

“Guardian of Us All”

The Rev. Drew Willard
July 24th, 2016
10th Sun./Pentecost

Genesis 18:20-32

Luke 11:1-13

Finally, Abraham said,

“Please don’t get angry, LORD, if I speak just once more.

Suppose you find only ten good people there.”

“For the sake of ten good people,” the LORD told him, “I still won’t destroy the city.”

Genesis 18:32

Let us pray... O God,

Guardian of us all, hear our cry to you in times of challenge,

but also send us the help we need on a daily basis.

May we be vigilant to avoid trouble,

but when it comes, may we always trust you.

Amen

Sodom and Gomorrah was as bad as it gets!

Those Twin Cities of Sin pretty much set the standard for urban bad behavior.

By the way, has anybody here ever been to the Twin Cities?

Minneapolis-St. Paul? Or is it St. Paul-Minneapolis?

How do you know you are in one and not the other?

How about Kansas City? Kansas City, MO or Kansas City, Kansas?

Well it was kind of like that with Sodom and Gomorrah –

being twin cities, that is, and that’s as far as the comparison goes!

After all, that is where Garrison Keillor is from, which is...

“Where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking,
and all the children are above average!”

Sodom is mentioned quite a bit in Genesis, but Gomorrah hardly at all.

Still, their mutual population was especially infamous for

wanting to get to ‘know’ their visitors in the so-called ‘Biblical way’.

They have been condemned throughout history

and used as an indictment of alternative lifestyles.

However, Walter Wink reminds us that there is a distinction between

criminal behavior and the loving behavior of adults

true to their gender orientation.

However, Sodom’s principal offense – according to traditional Jewish scholars,
was that this was not about sex,

but rather the violation of hospitality as a cultural standard

and that their crimes also included economic oppression and violence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodom_and_Gomorrah

Sodom and Gomorrah was a world of

depraved indifference and indiscriminate violence.

They were irredeemable and doomed – except that Abraham tried to defend them,
asking God to reconsider destroying these wretched cities.

Willard, p.2

It is almost like a comedy routine –

“Would you spare the city if 50 people of goodwill could be found?”

“How about 45?” “How about 30?” “20?” “10?”

You can just imagine God answering with increasing frustration:

“Yes”, “Yes”, “Yes”, “Yes!”, “YES!”

In the Book of Jonah, it is God who is making the case with Jonah

to show mercy to Nineveh – a city of more than 120,000 people,
who were hated enemies of Israel.

Perhaps God was testing Abraham – like Jonah had been tested,
to see if Abraham was capable of empathy.

Later, God would test Abraham’s obedience to see if he were willing
to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

At the last minute, an angel was sent to tell Abraham to stop –
and he did.

So perhaps that was the bigger test – to see if Abraham was alert at the last minute
as well as obedient for the sake of empathy to *not* sacrifice his son.

Abraham’s nephew Lot & his family were still living in Sodom,
so it’s not clear why Abraham didn’t ask God to spare them by name.

They were certainly important to him since Abraham had
earlier, taken more than 300 men to rescue Lot and family
when they were captured by the *enemies* of Sodom.

Abraham also recovered the goods taken as spoils of war by that army
and returned them directly to the king of Sodom without taking compensation.

Apparently, Sodom itself – as well as Lot, was important enough to Abraham
to dare to question God.

But perhaps Abraham was afraid to debate further with God to spare the city for
less than 10 people – or did he figure that 10 would be enough
in Lot’s household to save Sodom and Gomorrah?

God apparently knew the people of Sodom and Gomorrah better than Abraham –
Their hearts were too hardened and not even 10 good people could be found
beyond Lot, his wife, their 2 daughters & 2 husbands.

When angels disguised as men arrive at Sodom,
Lot urges them to come as guests into his home – to protect them.

Soon after, a crowd of locals came knocking at Lot’s door,
but they had no second thoughts beyond satisfying their own appetites
to abuse these strangers.

But they were messing with the wrong guys, because as the crowd tries to break in,
these angels blind and disperse them.

Though God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah anyway, saving Lot and his family,
we do have this hopeful story that God was willing to be bargain
for the sake of mercy.

Willard, p.3

In our Gospel lesson today, *we* are urged to knock on God's door with expectation that we will get help even in our most desperate need.

We are to ask, seek, and knock – for as it is written in Luke 10:10.

For every one who asks receives, and [the one] who seeks finds, and to [the one] who knocks it will be opened.

This is the same teaching that is found in the Sermon on the Mount of the Gospel of Matthew.

In the Gospel of Luke, there is a similar collection of sayings called the Sermon on the Plain which is in the 6th Chapter.

This particular saying in Luke however is part of Jesus' teachings at the end of his journey to Jerusalem in the 11th Chapter.

As an illustration of “Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will open”, we have this amusing scenario of a friend coming to a next door neighbor – *at midnight* in need of bread for unexpected visitors!

So once again, we see situations of how important the role of hospitality was to the early Christians.

Jesus teaches us that a person in need, is a compelling enough reason to help; but he also uses this as an opportunity to teach about the nature of God –

...how much more will the heavenly [Abba] Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask... !” [Luke 11:13^b]

Earlier this year, our Not Ready for Prime Time Play Readers Theater did a skit about the dynamics of helping those who come to our door in need of help.

Our general rule is to give anyone who comes to our door, something – not necessarily money which would come from

the Pastor's Discretionary Fund,

but most often to help people get connected with social services.

Sometimes, they just get a prayer,

but always we seek to provide people with an opportunity for hope.

The Golden Rule – the Love Ethic, provides the measuring stick for these situations, helping others in the way – you hope, someone else would help you...

Empathy and hospitality together, is the antidote to racism, putting yourself in somebody else's shoes,

or as that old Native American adage goes:

“To walk a mile in someone else's moccasins.”

Willard, p.4

Later this afternoon, we are all invited to do just that,
meeting at Wildwood City Hall at 5:30 pm for the Prayer Walk for Racial Unity.
Actually, it will involve walking in those 'moccasins' for a little more than
a mile and a half, with a ride back to City Hall.

Folks, we all have a bias. We all come from some perspective of politics and faith
about people, events, issues, and the so-called, 'Truth'.
But let each of us approach one another with a bias of love that challenges us
to do what is most loving – for the sake of our neighbors as
we would hope for ourselves.

Our lesson from Luke today opened with the Lord's Prayer
and I will close with the paraphrase I wrote for Matthew's version;

Let us pray...

Guardian of us all, who is in Heaven,

Let your name be respected; Let your beloved community come to be;

Let your design unfold, on Earth as in Heaven.

*Give us today, the bread we need; And forgive us our failures,
as we forgive those who fail us;*

And do not abandon us to disaster, but rescue us from the evildoer...

For all of the created universe belongs to you, O God,
and your power is made known through truth and love,
as your promise to us of a life of glory,
unfolds even now as well as in the time to come.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Genesis 18:20-32 tells how
Abraham entered into a dialogue with God
on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah,
and demonstrated that God is willing to work with us...*

²⁰ The LORD said,

“Abraham, I have heard that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah
are doing all kinds of evil things.

²¹ Now I am going down to see for myself if those people really are that bad.
If they aren’t, I want to know about it.”

²² The men turned and started toward Sodom.

But the LORD stayed with Abraham, ²³ who asked,

“LORD, when you destroy the evil people,
are you also going to destroy those who are good?

²⁴ Wouldn’t you spare the city if there are only fifty good people in it?

²⁵ You surely wouldn’t let them be killed when you destroy the evil ones.
You are the judge of all the earth, and you do what is right.”

²⁶ The LORD replied,

“If I find fifty good people in Sodom,
I will save the city to keep them from being killed.”

²⁷ Abraham answered,

“I am nothing more than the dust of the earth.
Please forgive me, LORD, for daring to speak to you like this.

²⁸ But suppose there are only forty-five good people in Sodom.
Would you still wipe out the whole city?”

“If I find forty-five good people,” the LORD replied,

“I won’t destroy the city.”

²⁹ “Suppose there are just forty good people?”

Abraham asked.

“Even for them,” the LORD replied,

“I won’t destroy the city.”

³⁰ Abraham said,

“Please don’t be angry, LORD,
if I ask you what you will do if there are only thirty good people in the city.”

“If I find thirty,” the LORD replied, “I still won’t destroy it.”

³¹ Then Abraham said,

“I don’t have any right to ask you, LORD,
but what would you do if you find only twenty?” —

“Because of them, I won’t destroy the city,”
was the LORD’s answer.

³² Finally, Abraham said,

“Please don’t get angry, LORD, if I speak just once more.
Suppose you find only ten good people there.”

“For the sake of ten good people,” the LORD told him, “I still won’t destroy the city.”

Let us be challenged and guided by these words

Luke 11:1-13

- ¹[Jesus] was praying in a certain place,
and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him,
“Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”
- ²And he said to them,
“When you pray, say:
“[Abba] Father, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
³Give us each day our daily bread; ⁴and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us;
and lead us not into temptation.”
- ⁵And he said to them,
“Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him,
‘Friend, lend me three loaves;
⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey,
and I have nothing to set before him’;
⁷and he will answer from within,
‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut,
and my children are with me in bed;
I cannot get up and give you anything’?
⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything
because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity
he will rise and give him whatever he needs.
⁹And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.
¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and [the one] who seeks finds,
and to [the one] who knocks it will be opened.
¹¹What [parent] among you, if [your children ask] for a fish,
will instead of a fish give [them] a serpent;
¹²or if [they] asks for an egg, will give [them] a scorpion?
¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will the heavenly [Guardian] Father
give the Holy Spirit to those who ask [...]!”