

“People on The Margins”

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Isaiah 65:17-25

Luke 21:1-19

And [Jesus] said,

*“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them;
for they all contributed out of their abundance,*

but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.”

Luke 21:3

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to recognize that ‘the least of these’ who are people on the margins of life
are really the same as us, as being kin to us.

If we are needed to ‘be the Christ’ in a given situation, grant us the courage
to defuse anger and encourage understanding of ‘our common lot’ together.

Amen

The Gospel is about the scandal of Jesus’ Crucifixion and
the triumph of his Resurrection; But also anticipates the Day of Judgment –
when God puts things right, to punish the wicked and reward the faithful.

Hear now my telling of Matthew 25:31-46

**“SOMEDAY, THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY
WILL SHOW UP BY THE GRACE OF GOD,
IN THE COMPANY OF ALL THE ANGELIC BEINGS.**

AT THAT TIME

**THIS MIGHTY ONE WILL BE SEATED UPON A RADIANT THRONE
IN WHOSE PRESENCE WILL BE GATHERED
ALL THE ETHNIC PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.**

**THEN THEY WILL BE SEPARATED, INDIVIDUALLY, ONE FROM ANOTHER,
LIKE A SHEPHERD SORTS OUT SHEEP FROM GOATS.**

AND WAITING ON ONE HAND WILL BE THOSE

‘INNOCENT’ SELF-RIGHTEOUS LAMBS

AND ON THE OTHER,

THE ‘SCAPEGOATS’ WHO ARE ALWAYS LEFT BEHIND.

BUT THIS MIGHTY ONE WILL SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE ‘IN THE RIGHT’,

“WELCOME, DEAREST OF MY ABBA, MY HEAVENLY GUARDIAN!

AND RECEIVE THE INHERITANCE OF BELOVED COMMUNITY

PREPARED FOR YOU FROM SEEDS SOWN

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD!

FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING TO EAT,

I WAS THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING TO DRINK,

I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME,

I WAS HOMELESS AND YOU SHELTERED ME,

I WAS SICK AND YOU VISITED ME,

I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU RESCUED ME.”

Willard, p.2

THEN, THOSE WHO ARE 'IN THE RIGHT'

WILL ANSWER, SAYING,

"LORD,

WHEN DID WE SEE YOU HUNGRY

AND GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO EAT

OR THIRSTY AND GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK?

WHEN DID WE SEE YOU A STRANGER AND WELCOME YOU

OR HOMELESS AND SHELTER YOU?

WHEN DID WE SEE YOU SICK

OR IN PRISON AND CARE FOR YOU?

AND THE MIGHTY ONE WILL ANSWER, SAYING TO THEM,

"I TELL YOU THE TRUTH,

IN AS MUCH AS YOU HELPED THE LEAST OF THESE

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

THE MINORITY IN YOUR MIDST,

YOU HELPED ME."

THEN, THIS ONE WILL SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE NOW 'LEFT',

"BEGONE FROM ME!

BE CONDEMNED TO THE FIRES OF TRUTH

PREPARED FOR THE DECEIVER

AND THAT ONE'S SERVANT LIARS!

FOR I WAS HUNGRY

AND YOU GAVE ME NOTHING TO EAT,

THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME NOTHING TO DRINK,

A STRANGER AND YOU DID NOT WELCOME ME,

HOMELESS AND YOU NOT SHELTER ME,

SICK AND IN PRISON AND I WAS OF NO CONCERN TO YOU"

THEN THEY WILL ANSWER SAYING,

"LORD,

WHEN DID WE SEE YOU HUNGRY OR THIRSTY

OR A STRANGER OR HOMELESS OR SICK OR IN PRISON

AND NOT CARE FOR YOU?"

AND THE MIGHTY ONE WILL ANSWER, SAYING,

"I TELL YOU THE TRUTH,

IN AS MUCH AS YOU NEGLECTED THE LEAST OF THESE,

THE MINORITY IN YOUR MIDST, YOU NEGLECTED ME."

AND THOSE WHO WERE HARDHEARTED WILL GO OFF

INTO ETERNAL DISAPPOINTMENT,

WHILE THOSE WHO LOVED OTHERS WILL ENTER ETERNAL LIFE."

Willard, p.3

Who are the 'least of these'?

They are the people on the margins – certainly the minorities in our midst, but this election has shown us they are also among those of the majority: the poor, white working class and especially, middle class whites who recently became poor...

I am reminded of John Steinbeck's classic novel, "The Grapes of Wrath", which tells about a family of farmers, the Joad family – who like many other families, were forced out on the road by the famine called the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

They couldn't pay their mortgages, so the banks foreclosed on them, and they went looking for work out in California, stopping in camps along the way – to be frequently preyed upon by orchard-owners and corrupt officials.

There are no people of color in the book or in John Ford's film adaptation with this exception: a Native American woman is shown weaving at an upright loom as the Joad family drives through an Arizona town.

Therefore, if white people were being treated as terribly as Steinbeck's work has portrayed, then we can't even imagine what that time was like for Native and African-Americans.

That is just the point: This story shows just how the system treated its own – how white people themselves were labeled as 'Okies' and of no more concern to the banks, the industrial farms, or the general 'powers that be' than the blacks and Indian communities they generally ignored.

So, the 'least of these' back then, included white working people – and that has become true again, now.

David Brooks, a columnist for the NY Times wrote this:

The white working class once sat comfortably at the core of the American idea, but now its members have seen their skills devalued, their neighborhoods transformed, their masculinity delegitimized, their family structures decimated, their dignity erased and their basic decency questioned.

Marginalized, they commonly feel invisible, alienated and culturally pessimistic.

This year the workers overthrew their corporate masters and grabbed control of [their political party].

Willard, p.4

*That would be progress and even inspiring, but –
maybe because of the candidate who is leading it –
the working-class revolt has been laced with
bigotry, anti-Semitism, class hatred, misogyny and authoritarianism
that has further rent the American fabric.*

*Our partisan divides now menacingly overlap
with our racial and class divides, threatening to form a trinity of
discord with horrendous consequences.*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/opinion/lets-not-do-this-again.html>

We all need to recognize we are in the same boat, and our fates are tied together.

We are family and we have got to start talking with each other

We have to ask questions to find out where the pain is and be willing to listen.

I grew up in the late 1960s when there was a war on overseas in Vietnam –
and one at home that was fought for Civil Rights and against war for Peace.

It was a scary time for me as a white kid growing up in
a predominantly black community, in a society that seemed to be coming apart.

I don't know, but I can imagine what it must be like for children growing up now,
in this country no matter what their tribe:

white, black, Muslim, Jew, Christian, LGBTQ, straight, Latino,
immigrant, Native, minority, majority, and female...

But in the midst of all that I faced, Christ showed up in my life

to begin to show me that there is a way through the challenges we face
and that meant for me to step across the abyss of my ignorance...

At the end of the film version of “The Grapes of Wrath”,

Tom Joad in saying goodbye to his mother, tells her...

*maybe I can do somethin'... maybe I can just find out somethin',
just scrounge around and maybe find out what it is that's wrong
and see if they ain't somethin' that can be done about it.*

I ain't thought it out all clear, Ma. I can't. I don't know enough.

From today's lesson from Isaiah 65:21-22^a

My people will live in the houses they build;

they will enjoy grapes from their own vineyards.

No one will take away their homes or vineyards.

This was echoed by Tom Joad who tells his mother:

*I'll be everywhere. Wherever you can look - wherever there's a fight,
so hungry people can eat, I'll be there.*

Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there.

I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad.

*I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and
they know supper's ready,*

*and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise
and livin' in the houses they build - I'll be there, too.*

Willard, p.5

That is called “incarnation” – ‘being the Christ’

and that is what we endeavor to do as a faith community
in our ecumenical, interfaith, and civic outreach projects.

Our afterschool “Creative Arts” project

for the children of Wildwood Elementary Public School, is one;

The “Epic Reading” series we are doing

with Young Performing Artists of Royal in Wildwood, is another;

Our participation in the “Interfaith Peace Partners” prayer services,

“Community Thanksgiving Service” at Temple Shalom this week,

and “Love Sunday” here is bringing us together with Temple Shalom
and the Islamic Center of South Lake County in Clermont; and

“Harvest Sunday” with the Farmworkers of Dade City – challenging us to

better understand what these people on the margins are going through.

In “The Grapes of Wrath”, Casy the preacher says we will be taking a beating until
we do know.

There are things we already know are wrong and things we know we can do
in the meantime, to ‘be the Christ’ for everyone’s sake;

The following is from a Stillspeaking devotional by UCC pastor Molly Baskette,
entitled the “Safety Pin Movement”...

*'There is a movement afoot to invite those who want to be allies
in public places to wear a safety pin clearly and visibly wherever they go.
And if you want to help people in danger even more practically, here's a meme,
which I've tweaked a la UCC:*

If you wear a hijab, I'll sit with you on the train.

If you're trans, I'll go to the bathroom with you.

*If you're a person of color, I'll stand with you if the cops stop you
[for both your sakes].*

If you're a person with disabilities, I'll hand you my megaphone.

If you're an immigrant, I'll help you find resources.

If you're a survivor, I'll believe you.

If you're a refugee, I'll make sure you're welcome.

If you're a veteran, I'll take up your fight.

*If you're LGBTQ, I'll remind you that you are beautiful and beloved,
just as God made you.*

If you're a woman, I'll make sure you get home ok.

If you're tired, me too.

If you need a hug, I've got an infinite supply.

If you need me, I'll be with you.

All I ask is that you be with me, too.

Together, we'll be the strong arm of God.'

Willard, p.6

The Gospel message is always about both Crucifixion and Resurrection –

‘Crucifixion’ in terms of the brokenness of our human condition,
of bodies that falter, of relationships that go sour,
of corporate organizations that fail to care for their people,
and of how the strong prey upon the weak...

Yet there is ‘Resurrection’, too, of hope that comes when someone is willing
to put themselves out there - to ‘be the Christ’ for the transformation of society
and of oneself in the process even when chances are slim to none.

I invite you to follow along or say the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith
in the form of a prayer of praise and listen for the part about ‘our common lot’:

We believe in you, O God,

Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,
and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people
from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.
Amen.

Our scripture lesson from Isaiah 65:17-25 speaks to how God is concerned for the welfare of humankind – and of all creatures.

This includes transforming the heavens and the earth as well as human society for the benefit of all...

- ¹⁷ I am creating new heavens and a new earth;
everything of the past will be forgotten.
- ¹⁸ Celebrate and be glad forever! I am creating a Jerusalem, full of happy people.
¹⁹ I will celebrate with Jerusalem and all of its people;
there will be no more crying or sorrow in that city.
- ²⁰ No child will die in infancy; everyone will live to a ripe old age.
Anyone a hundred years old will be considered young,
and to die younger than that will be considered a curse.
- ²¹ My people will live in the houses they build;
they will enjoy grapes from their own vineyards.
- ²² No one will take away their homes or vineyards.
My chosen people will live to be as old as trees,
and they will enjoy what they have earned.
- ²³ Their work won't be wasted, and their children won't die of dreadful diseases.
I will bless their children and their grandchildren.
- ²⁴ I will answer their prayers before they finish praying.
²⁵ Wolves and lambs will graze together; lions and oxen will feed on straw.
Snakes will eat only dirt!
They won't bite or harm anyone on my holy mountain.
- I, the LORD, have spoken!

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 21:1-19

¹[Jesus] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury;

² and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins.

³ And he said,

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them;

⁴ for they all contributed out of their abundance,

but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.”

⁵ And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,

⁶ “As for these things which you see, the days will come

when there shall not be left here one stone upon another

that will not be thrown down.”

⁷ And they asked him,

“Teacher, when will this be,

and what will be the sign when this is about to take place?”

⁸ And he said,

“Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name, saying,

‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them.

⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified;

for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them,

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;

¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places

famines and pestilences;

and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you,

delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons,

and you will be brought before kings and governors

for my name’s sake.

¹³ This will be a time for you to bear testimony.

¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds,

not to meditate beforehand how to answer;

¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom,

which none of your adversaries will be able

to withstand or contradict.

¹⁶ You will be delivered up

even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends,

and some of you they will put to death;

¹⁷ you will be hated by all

for my name’s sake.

¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.