

“Got Talent”

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UCC at The Villages, FL
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Stewardship Sunday

Psalm 90:1-12

Matthew 25:14-30

[The Psalmist wrote,] *Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.*

Psalm 90:12

Let us pray... O God,
In the time we have as sojourners in this life,
 help us to bring to full expression who we are as people.
In so doing, may we help others to find their gifts,
 and co-operate with them in their communities
 for our mutual prosperity and well-being.

Amen

One of the most beloved stories of American popular culture is “The Wizard of Oz” –
I say that because it was kind of a holiday in and of itself,
 when it was shown on national TV around Thanksgiving-time every year.
I expect you know the story, but just in case you don’t
 A Kansas school girl named Dorothy Gale and her pet dog Toto seek refuge
 in her home to escape a tornado.
The house is swept up into the sky and lands in a fanciful land called Oz –
 and directly on top of the Wicked Witch of the East.
This makes Dorothy a hero with the little people called the Munchkins,
 but not with the late witch’s even meaner sister
 the Wicked Witch of the West who now has it in for Dorothy!
But Dorothy has the deceased one’s Ruby Slippers,
 which have remarkable powers that will help her later on.

Dorothy wants desperately to get back home to Kansas
 and a fairy godmother called Glinda the Good Witch shows up
 to send her on a journey to find the Wizard of Oz
 to get help – and to get home.
Along the way, she meets three male characters who are all
 in some state of woundedness.
Upon learning of Dorothy’s journey to find the Wizard,
 each of them is convinced the Wizard could help them, too,
 and so they ask to go along...

Without this being too much of a spoiler alert,
 each of the characters learn that they already had the things
 they so desperately needed.

“The Wizard of Oz” is a cautionary tale like our scripture lessons this morning
that we must invest in our talents while we can.

Willard, p.2

Jesus' parable is another example of how we should not assume that the authority figures in his parables translate directly to God. Even today's Psalm 90 takes a harsh tone about God as an angry despot, as the Psalmist says in verses 7-8...

*Your furious anger frightens and destroys us,
and you know all of our sins, even those we do in secret.*

The question is: What is God angry about and why?

As rational people who believe that 'God so loved the world', and that God is our creator, isn't it reasonable to accept God's judgment for injustice against people and animals as well as for the neglect of the environment?

Jesus could get angry.

He certainly got angry with scribes and Pharisees, but also with the Twelve Disciples.

'Original Sin' notwithstanding,

Jesus got angry because he expected people to do the right thing; He knew that we can and should do what is good.

In Jesus' parable about an absentee investor who returns to reward and punish his subordinates –

there seems to be a tone of agitation in how Jesus tells this story.

This seems to be true with the previous parable of the wise & foolish maidens as well as the next parable of the Son of Man seated on a celestial throne to sort out the sheep and goats.

Jesus is telling these stories to his closest disciples – who are terrified by his prediction that the Temple of Jerusalem would be destroyed.

This is after a day of confrontation when he cursed a fig tree that dies, and drove out moneychangers in the Temple infuriating the high priests.

So, in the intimacy of the Mount of Olives as they all settle down for the night, the disciples ask him to explain what is going on – and what will happen to them?

Hear now my interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew 24:4-14 which is part of what Jesus initially tells them as a lead-in to these parables...

Willard, p.3

Jesus said,

“Be aware so that no one can deceive you,
for many will come in my name saying,
‘I am the Messiah!’ and many will be tricked.
So certainly there will be wars and threats of war,
but it will not be the end.
Ethnic group will rise up against ethnic group
and nationalist against nationalist.
There will be famines and earthquakes everywhere,
and all this is but the beginning... the pain of birth.
But you will be betrayed into oppression and put to death.
You will be hated by all factions because of the name ‘Jesus’.
So, many will fall into scandal betraying one another
and hating one another.
And many false prophets will be lifted up
and many people will be drawn in by them.
And through the festering of lawlessness,
love will be poisoned in many people’s hearts.
But the one whose love endures to the end will be saved,
and that is the Good News of God’s beloved community
that must be proclaimed everywhere in the inhabited world
as a witness against extremisms.
And then, the end will truly be... a beginning!”

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible puts verses this way:

And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold.

But he who endures to the end will be saved.

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world,
as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.*

To repeat:

most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Just survival would not be enough – even believing would not be enough,

But to paraphrase: It is those whose love *endures to the end will be saved.*

Certainly, that doesn’t mean what group you belong to or the things you do,

but to have the capacity to care – to have heart,

to have the willingness to use your gifts to try again, and again if need be.

We all have gifts – we all have talents,

whether that is one talent or five kinds of talent.

Maybe you are not a good cook, but you appreciate good eating.

Maybe you are not musical, but you appreciate good music.

Being a good audience – or even a good critic, takes talent

that contributes to that *gospel of the kingdom*

[that needs to] be preached throughout the whole world.

Willard, p.4

This is the time to keep listening and start using our heads to tell the difference between what is true and worthy and what is false and shameful.

Know your narrative about God through the stories & teachings of Christ.

We must cultivate our hearts to be open to recognize diversity as the new normal – not just for being an American or even a Christian, but for being human.

Know your narrative for being ‘open & affirming’ of ‘justice & peace’.

We must be brave in our conversations with relatives and friends around holiday time, to hang in there with them.

Know your narrative of God’s Kingdom as a ‘beloved community’ that can only be achieved through nonviolent confrontation – love!

We are all refugees, in a way of speaking, until we make a space for everybody to find a place in our hearts as well as our table.

Because there is no place like home, and no matter who you are or where you are on your journey to get there at least you are welcome here in the church of God through Christ Jesus of Nazareth.

Amen

Our lesson from Psalm 90:1-12 as found in the Common English Version,
presents a grimly realistic view of life and of God's power,
while maintaining hope that God will guide us...

¹Our Lord, in all generations
you have been our home.

²You have always been God— long before the birth of the mountains,
even before you created the earth and the world.

³At your command we die and turn back to dust,

⁴but a thousand years mean nothing to you!

They are merely a day gone by or a few hours in the night.

⁵You bring our lives to an end just like a dream.

We are merely tender grass

⁶that sprouts and grows in the morning, but dries up by evening.

⁷Your furious anger frightens and destroys us,

⁸and you know all of our sins, even those we do in secret.

⁹Your anger is a burden each day we live, then life ends like a sigh.

¹⁰We can expect seventy years, or maybe eighty, if we are healthy,
but even our best years bring trouble and sorrow.

Suddenly our time is up, and we disappear.

¹¹No one knows the full power of your furious anger,

but it is as great as the fear that we owe to you.

¹²Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.

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

Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus said,]

- ¹⁴ “For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property;
¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.
- ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more.
- ¹⁷ So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more.
- ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.
- ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.
- ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying,
‘Master, you delivered to me five talents;
here I have made five talents more.’
- ²¹ His master said to him,
‘Well done, good and faithful servant;
you have been faithful over a little,
I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’
- ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying,
‘Master, you delivered to me two talents;
here I have made two talents more.’
- ²³ His master said to him,
‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little,
I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’
- ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying,
‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow;
²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.
Here you have what is yours.’
- ²⁶ But his master answered him,
‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed?
²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.
²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents.
²⁹ For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance;
but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
- ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness;
there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’