

Living This Crazy, Lovely Gospel

Psalm 19; Luke 16:1-13

Sunday, September 19, 2010

We begin a new church season today. We return to the sanctuary for worship. The choir returns. We have an annual meeting coming up after church. Church School begins today and there will be a church school picnic this afternoon. The plans that staff and committees have put together begin to roll out. There is a sense of return and renewal. We welcome friends and guests and strangers alike with the sense that we are picking up the rhythm of church life again. Autumn has come. It is time to buckle down to a new season's faster pace and greater expectations.

As we begin, it is good to hear Jesus' somewhat mocking reminder in Luke's gospel this morning not to get too comfortable with our plans or take what we have and what we do in church for granted. Life happens! The best laid plans go awry! There will be times when we have to scramble, reconfigure, do the best we can in the moment! Jesus teases us with the hope that this year we will work for honorable and the just things with as much passion and enthusiasm as a dishonest manager works to save his skin! At least the dishonest manager, caught with his hand in the till, knows what is at stake and will do whatever it takes. Too often, Jesus hints, the good folk among us seem surprised and unprepared when life takes an unexpected turn. *So, God, what happened? We didn't see this coming! Why us?*

So, the text suggests this morning, don't get stuck in our plans! Be prepared! Don't be victims! Work for the good and the true and the beautiful with all our strength, keeping an eye peeled. Then, when the unexpected happens, we won't lose heart. We will learn to do our very best in all things and let the chips fall

where they may. And in the end – we will be all right. We will, in fact, be just fine.

There's a deeper invitation to the story, deeper than church seasons. There's an invitation to live – *really live!* – and not just get by. We are invited to expect that there will be gifts and opportunities we cannot even imagine now. And what will our response be? Will we ignore or discard them because they are not what we expected? Or will we unwrap them with a sense of wonder and awe and ask – *as though it really matters and our lives depend on it!* – “God, what do you want me to see here?”

You see, there is a crazy, lovely gospel to be lived. It is a gospel of unapologetic love, and each one of us brings a fragment into the world. It is love that contains within it all the words we strive so hard for: compassion, justice, peace, union, acceptance, welcome, reconciliation, forgiveness. It's that big! It's why we come to church – hoping to find evidence that our fragment fills out a larger picture and we are not alone! We come as well because we know we get snagged by fear that our fragment is all there is, and there is no larger picture. We come asking what to do with our fear.

Have you ever asked, *God, what do you want me to see here*, as though it really matters and your life depends on the answer?

Here's the thing. When you make the choice to really ask, *there will be an answer!* The answer may be as simple as a restlessness with what is. It may be an awareness you don't want to run away anymore. It may be a decision that it's time to forgive. Or it may be more explicit.

A friend of mine told me that he once was faced with a choice he had to make that was really shaking him to the core. One evening he turned and just blurted out, *So, Jesus, what do you want me to do with this choice?* And then he heard a voice, just over his head, say to him, quietly, *Be mine....Be mine.* Since that time my friend has never feared that he is alone in his choices.

Another friend – a colleague, a really bright, interesting person, accustomed to figuring life out and knowing what to do, an intellectual – recently found herself in some doubt. She kept trying to figure out what was wrong and why she couldn't quite see the next step. Then one night, something happened she never had experienced before in her fifty some years. Jesus came to her in a dream and stood gazing at her. She found she couldn't look at him. She couldn't return his gaze. For four nights running Jesus returned in the dream and still she couldn't look in his eyes. And then on the fifth night she went to bed determined that she would. That night, in the dream, Jesus came again, she turned her eyes to him and she saw deep love in his eyes, and felt herself lifted up in peace.

So Jesus mocks and teases us this morning. What would we give our allegiance to? The bank? The mall? The online store? The credit card? The TV show? The talk radio host? The book? The advanced degree? The title? The heritage? And which of these things will show us how to live our fragment of this crazy, lovely gospel?

I invite you to ask, and ask again until you begin to see that what you bring into life is vital and beautiful to God. And then you must claim it and give your commitment and full attention to the transformational presence you can be. This is the crazy, lovely gospel this morning: *You were born of God's love, but until you claim it, no one will know!*

As we begin a new season, then, let the work begin. Let us have church, and annual meetings and picnics and all the good harvest that the season brings. But let us give our our full intention to the deeper claim. *Before all else, Lord, we are yours. Where would you take us now?*

Before you leave the sanctuary at the end of worship, I invite you – if you wish – only if you wish! – to stop by the communion table. On the table is the gift I unwrapped with the kids. Pick it up, turn it over and take a look. You will see what is more precious than silver or gold. You will see the word of God for our living today!

{Note: The gift is a mirror. Each one of us is a living word of God!}

Amen