

Sermon for Sunday 12 July 2020 @ Bethesda

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

*"Looking back, going forward"*

After considerable study and prayer this week, I offer you today a collection of random thoughts.

First, after the 10:30 service we will hold a "church council" ... all invited ... to consider two topics: 1) "Opening" the church building to services again, and 2) Expanding our internet capacity.

These are big changes from what's become familiar. We've had a website, somewhat, but there's much more to look at. As for re-opening worship to bodily gathering, that's such a strange thought that I can only point to other historic moments in Bethesda: Moving from the original wooden building to the brand new 1930 stone complex (and before that, of course, the move from the Davis' family living room onto the present site and into the wooden building); then the 1960's addition of the A-frame building we now have; and then the considerable remodeling of the whole plant in the 1990's, with the classrooms we now know, the elevator, etc. All this is only physical ... but it is valuable to reminisce, commemorate, and recognize that we are a result of plenty of debate, lots of uncertainty, many times of guidance through prayer ... and so here we go again!

Beyond that, it seems every day we come across another uncertainty like none we've faced before. Just listen to the debate about opening schools this fall, and the matter of how to hold a fair election ... and just yesterday I read a thoughtful doctor's piece on the need to stay up on tuberculosis care worldwide, which we've neglected in recent months.

Another thoughtful medical expert suggested there may not be a vaccine that solves everything ... we may be headed towards a whole list of medicine and regimens that, wisely administered, will add to world health and reduce the panic of the moment. Simplicity, no; progress, yes, if we work at it together.

Against the background of all this, we do as usual, duplicating our daily devotions with the larger weekly traditions of worship that, even now, we are creatively following and sharing.

The first scripture reminds us that our approach to God comes through a family story, at least for a few founding generations. The reading from Genesis shows strife, humor, problem-solving ... and so we hear, and tell one another, that this is the stuff we work with, and God works with, so, face and use our versions of it well, Amen.

The psalm establishes our dependence on a collection of written documents ... not as absolute truth, but as the central resource for all our life together and individually. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet..." What comes to us as we faithfully examine, pray over, debate, and organize

ourselves according to Scripture is reliable, even as it consistently fails to elaborate on much that occupies us moment to moment.

The passage from Romans for today beautifully calls me to prayer. I can't describe how it's done ...I'm working on this, as experimentally as though I'd just started ... but the Spirit of God through Jesus Christ, working through my friends in church, is more helpful than I have found elsewhere. The "flesh" is Paul's term for everything that works otherwise ... I'm groping here ... What can I say? The flesh is also part of God's good creation ... and we have all sorts of examples of calling something "God's will" when it's less than that ... but can I get close to you in hope, and lots of the time in lived experience, when I say the Spirit saves me rather than the flesh? How I stood amazed, just yesterday, at an insight that came to me because I'd just been a goofus?

Finally, the Gospel has Jesus using a parable to describe life. To explain it isn't my job as preacher. I can ask you, "Do you find that lots of good things waste away? Do you surprise yourself with your kindness sometimes? What about control ... is it mystifying you, whether you notice it in someone teaching a child well, or something in the current emergencies?" I can do that. I can encourage you to be patient with me ... and give thanks for the baby steps I take in that direction towards loving you ... but "The kingdom of heaven is like a sower who went out to sow seed..." is where Jesus begins and ends today.

What about you? What welcome have you given Christ this week? Where are you praying most? How can we, together, provide beauty, and self-caring, and hope where we pass, this day?

Through the Spirit of Christ among us, I say,

Amen.