



GPS GUIDE: MAY 16, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Seventh Sunday after Easter

Sermon: Stewardship as an Act of Love

Mark 10:17-22

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Monday: Read Amos 5:6-15

Amos is a hard book with tough words. The charges against the Israelites are quite clear. After the general indictment against those who would turn justice into rot, tossing righteousness on the ground (v.7), we hear the more specific crimes. One of the most relevant might be verse 10: “They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.” The “gate” in ancient Israel was often seen as the place where judgment occurred, or legal and economic transactions took place. This is the venue where Boaz negotiated for the right to redeem Elimelech’s land and marry Naomi’s daughter-in-law, Ruth. The gate is also where Absalom stole the hearts and minds of Israel’s citizens from his father David by rendering judgment and discerning disputes among the citizens (1 Sam 15:1-6). If we continue reading (v.11-12) we discover that the gate is also a place of communal justice, a place of compassion and welcome for those in need. Like the prophet Amos, perhaps the good news of this text is that God is calling the church to foolishly demand the restoration of justice and goodness at the gate that we might experience the graciousness of God. Where are the “gates” of justice, compassion, and welcome in our community? How can we “seek good

and not evil, that [we] may live"? How might we, as a church, demand the restoration of justice and goodness?

Prayer: God of all, help us to "seek good" in all of our living. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Hebrews 4:12-16

Even though Hebrews does not employ the actual word, empathy lies at the heart of the Christian faith. The New Testament believes that God is empathetic; that God's empathy extends beyond the capacity to understand human experience. Even extends to actively entering into human experience showing Jesus as the supreme example of empathy, as one who fully understands both the experience of God and the experience of humanity. God's entering human experience through Jesus initiated something new and better for humanity. God's empathy with the human story results in changing the human story. Inherent in our faith is the belief that empathy is central to religious faith and that empathy births new possibilities for those who are burdened, ill, oppressed, or dying. Empathy is the beginning of a story in which the sufferer feels new power and new life. It is at the heart of the Christian message and serves, in some profound way, as the key to understanding who God is, who Jesus is, and who believers in Jesus may become. As Ireneaus said long ago, "Jesus became what we are, in order that we might become what he is." In what ways do you find yourself entering and participating the story of another as Jesus did? How are you changed by these encounters?

Prayer: God, as you judge the intentions of our hearts, may you find us filled with empathy for all of humanity. Amen.

Wednesday: Read 1 John 4:16-21

Theologian Thomas Oord asks us whether love or power is the primary defining characteristic for God. It is clear that 1 John sees love as God's very nature. Love is not weak, but embraces all creation, seeking salvation for all. God's love powerfully transforms lives and sets us on the path of wholeness. God's love flows to and through us, and as we love, we share in God's loving and healing power, sharing it with those who need it most. In loving one another, we are rooted in God; and in that loving relatedness, God abides in us. God loved us first, and that overflowing, ever flowing, and sacrificial love gives us strength to sacrifice and love one another. How have you experienced God's loving and healing power in your own life? In what ways might you share God's love with others?

Prayer: God who casts out all fear, perfect your love in us. Amen.

Thursday: Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Loving is always risky, because we cannot enter into it without being changed. Altered. Transformed. In the face of this, we might well ask, *Do I really want*

this? Do we really desire to be so undone? Loving is never just about opening our heart. It is about being willing to have our heart become larger as we make room for people and stories and experiences we never imagined holding. It is about being willing to have our heart become deeper as we move beyond the surface layers of our assumptions, prejudices, and habits in order to truly see and receive what—and who—is before us. It is about being willing to have our heart continually shattered and remade as we take in not only the brokenness of the world but also the beauty of it, the astounding wonder that will not allow us to remain the same.

Prayer: Holy One, It is true that every blessing begins with love, that whatever else we might say, love is always precisely the point. Amen.

Friday: Read Ephesians 4:32-52

"Live a life of love," Paul tells the Ephesians in this letter. More specifically, Paul says, "faith expressing itself in love is what matters." In fact he said it was "*the only thing that matters.*" (Gal 5:6). In his book of poetry called *Leavings* (2012), Wendell Berry's poem-prayer gives us a way to begin that journey towards faith in love:

"I know that I have life
only insofar as I have love.
I have no love
except it come from Thee.
Help me, please, to carry
this candle against the wind."

Berry reminds us that life and love are deeply intertwined if not a little fragile as he asks for help keeping the flame lit. It isn't always easy to do, but when we live in love, says Paul in this passage, we imitate the character of God. We have life; we fulfill our human destiny. We're all "created to be like God," he says, and when we live in love we become nothing less than "imitators of God."

Prayer: God, help us to live our lives imitating you. Amen.

Saturday: Read Matthew 25:34-40

This is the climax of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel account. Here we can expect to find matters of central significance for Matthew and here is what we find: Matthew is not saying: pretend Jesus is in people and that will enable you to love them. Rather the sheep loved people because of who they were as people. The notion that in doing so they were also loving Jesus came to them as a surprise. The loving was real, not a means to enhance their relationship with Jesus... Love is what is ultimately important. Do we love? Do we really love, or do we keep score? But the demand for love seems to be at the heart of the gospel. I have not seen any other way to be faithful to the way of Jesus, except through the attempt to love people. Love is indeed and again, always the answer.

What does love “look like” to you? What are some tangible ways you can love people this week as you are faithful to the way of Jesus? In what ways is stewardship an act of love for you? How can you love more?

Prayer: Loving God, as we prayerfully respond in love, may our gifts and our offerings be a symbol of our love for people. Amen.



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