

Trusting the Spirit of God  
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*(Note: These are sermon notes and not a formal manuscript.)*

“Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us...”

This phrase from the collect this morning sums up my prayers over the last few months. I have been dreaming about you.... And praying for you... and we have arrived together. With gratitude for the countless ways God has gone before us since these doors opened in 1866 and how the spirit continues to be with us now, Messiah’s newest chapter.

We call scripture (more specifically the gospels) Good News and it is the case today. The passages might not be easy but they are good.

Honestly, my heart was fluttering in my chest as I read the lectionary when preparing for you. So many remarkable nuggets of inspiration and instruction...

“Seek the Lord and live...”

“So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”

“The Word of God is living and active”

“For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Such good news. So many wonderful invitations into a life in Christ together. I’m ready! And I hope you are too.

I also know there is a lot in the readings that might cause us to pause. Fearful of a double-edged sword dividing soul from spirit or wondering if we are more camel-like than we would like when faced with the eye of a needle. You are not alone. I feel it too.

What I learned deeply as I entered this season of transition is that two things CAN be true at the same time. There can be a holy “both/and” that is real and right. Even when it might be confusing or uncomfortable. We need not hurry past it nor try to quickly resolve the tension of unknowing.

Preachers throughout the church are most likely taking advantage of these scriptures to offer a stewardship sermon. After all, it's fall and it's the time we often begin to think about how we might be generous in our giving to the church. It is important... I want you to be thinking about it... but that is for another day.

I'm not, however, going to try to rescue you from these texts either. Amos and Mark come for us... and they come for our stuff. It might be tempting to shut down or tune out because you have no intention of giving everything up as suggested or you might feel a bit overwhelmed by the injustice of the distribution of worldly things. But stay with me. Hang in and consider what might be in these words that could set you free or offer you new life.

If we start with Jesus (which is always a good idea) we see that he is about to enter Jerusalem one last time before his crucifixion. He offers a ton of challenging messages right in a row. The last few weeks of the readings have been ROUGH. For most of the gospel of Mark, Jesus doesn't say much but then he lays down a study diet of difficult teachings. Jesus has a certain urgency. He doesn't have much time left to say all that he wants to say to the disciples and to the others gathered with him. Jesus offers several Passion predictions. He will die but what we must remember is that these passion predictions are also resurrection predictions. There IS a bigger picture. Death does not have the last word.

We are asked to think bigger too. In terms of our possessions and also our relationships. What do we give up? What might take up too much of our attention? What do we have or who do we value more than our relationship with God? It is not about the stuff, it's about what we do with it. The root of those harsh teachings or prophet messages is about justice. How will we use what we have to build the kingdom (or the kinship) of God here and now? How could our resources and actions empower others and build them up? How might what we have been offered to create goodness for many? How might we live so that the space between us is not quite as far?

It is a vision of family and community. Of church.

A vision of a holy economy where right relationship with God and others is the key. A place where we depend on one another and not the accumulation of the stuff that divides us. The idea that our stuff keeps us safe is an illusion.

Amos has strong words. Prophets usually do or we wouldn't listen to them, right? How we gain our riches matters. What happens to others as we accumulate our possessions matters. What does the Kingdom of God look like in our immediate reality? Are we living on the "right side of history" in the way we live?

It's not wrong for the word of God to leave us a little raw because it is a place where the spirit can enter.

The natural temptation as humans is to hear the messages today and wonder "what should I DO?" ....but maybe the real work of the spiritual life is to wonder, "How should I BE?"

I moved last spring. Nothing puts us more in touch with our stuff when we need to pack it up and move it to the next stop on our earthly journey. When I went to the uhaul store to buy boxes, the sales clerk said, "Boy, you must have a lot of stuff". I felt instantly judged and then wondered, "Do I have a lot of stuff?" At first, I heard his judgy voice in my head as I placed things into boxes but over the course of the weeks of preparation, I started to ask different questions...I shifted my focus from "Do I want to keep this?" to "I wonder what better life this would have for someone else?" It was a movement from what do I do with the stuff... to how should I be with my stuff? How might the goodness of God be made known by giving it up instead of lugging it along?

I must admit there was a little righteous smirk on my face when I was able return some of those boxes unused to that same uhaul clerk. But that was not really me being my best self. What did make my heart shine is imagining the meals that would be eaten off of those donated dishes, or conversations and comfort made possible by the furniture passed along. How restful nights might now be possible on the sheets and beds that wouldn't be stacked up in basement

storage. And I gave thanks for what it felt like to be connected to others in the giving. How doing it moved me one step closer to the teaching of Jesus - "give up everything to the poor and follow me..."

What might you give up to get just a little closer to Jesus' teachings too? How might your possessions take a lower priority to your relationships? How might your relationships speak of the love and care of a God who created us, redeems us, and remains with us always?

I imagine the rich man depicted in the Gospel of Mark went away grieving for one of two reasons - he didn't want to give anything up... or he simply didn't know where to begin.

We have something that the rich man did not have.... The ability to see the long view on the power and wisdom of Jesus. We stand on the other side of the resurrection and know there is no end to the love Jesus has for each of us.

I have a dear friend who says Jesus loves each of us best. And I feel I'm the newest of our call to be church together

So let us take the cue from Amos when we "seek the Lord and live" and let the living word of God continually work on us day by day. Trusting that the spirit of God will go before us now and always.

Amen.