

Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 27, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Joel 2:23-32 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

There is very little information contained in the book of Joel to provide a reliable date or location. The only thing that is clear is that a great plague of locust have devastated the countryside. This swarm of locust was most likely the result of a region wide drought which force the locust to migrate. This is why the gift of the early and later rains are so important ending not only the drought but also the threat of locust. For Joel, however, this is more than an agricultural event but a wake up call to prepare for the Day of the Lord. The "day of the Lord is at hand" says Joel 1:15 and the destruction will be greater than a drought of a swarm of locust. This is a time for the community to repent (2:15) and pray for mercy. The current text describes God's response to their humble repentance. Not only will the physical drought and famine end but the drought of God's blessings shall end and God will power will pour out not only rain but the spirit onto the land. All the people have to do is call on the name of the Lord.

Commentary on 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

When each individual faces their own death, there are generally two questions that they must face: 1) am I ready for what lies beyond the mortal veil and 2) what will I be remembered for when I am gone. Paul proclaims that there is a crown of righteousness reserved for him on the other side of the veil because he has fought the good fight. This fight, however, was not always supported by those he knew. Paul does not want to be remembered as someone abandoned by his friends but as someone for whom the Lord fought for. Paul's life as his death should proclaim the glory and grace of God. Remember, say Paul, not my credentials but rather my message to the Gentiles of Jesus Christ.

Commentary on Luke 18:9-14 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The Greek word for sin is also used in archery. Sin is the distance the arrow is from the center of the target. For the Pharisee, he viewed his righteousness as being closer to the center than the tax collector. The tax collector, however, did not view his life in competition with the Pharisee but rather only saw the distance he was from the center and repented. In this, the tax collector understood the true meaning of righteousness that Jesus proclaimed. Righteousness has nothing to do with comparing goodness between two individuals. Righteousness is all about if our will is in line with God's will, that is the center of the target. It does not matter how "good" we are in the eyes of the world but rather if the "good" we do is according to the will of God. At first glance, allowing himself to be arrested and crucified without even defending himself does not appear to be a "good" move by Jesus and yet it is through the crucifixion according to God's will that a greater "good" is revealed. No amount of "good" works can justify a person if they are not done in grace and in response to God's will for your life. Only when we humbly admit that everyone misses the mark and that we all need God's grace to help us fight the "good" fight, do we return home justified.

Sermon "Judge not lest ye be judged" (*No Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

Sometimes, no matter how much preparation you do and how much you pray, the sermon on Sunday morning never fully comes together. There is usually a critical piece missing or the timing is not quite right. This Sunday was one of those times. The sermon had the critical pieces of the nature of love, sin, and humility but it lacked a unifying catalyst. In humility (Luke), we need to call on the name of the Lord (Joel) and Jesus will give us the strength we need (2 Timothy). All the points were there but what is our call for humility today and how does that relate to love and sin. It was not until I

received an email on Sunday afternoon that all the pieces truly came together. (May be there was a reason I forgot my keys to the video camera and was unable to record the sermon on Sunday morning?)

The email was in [reference](#) to Grace Fellowship UMC of Katy, Texas "unanimously recommending" to leave the United Methodist denomination. On their website, they state "The particular issue that is surfacing this rift over the authority of Scripture is the issue of human sexuality". This is not a unique issue facing Grace Fellowship but is being addressed across the denomination. While the issue has built up over decades, it finally came to a head at the special called 2019 General Conference in which lines were drawn and divisions deepened. For those who regarded the issue in light of the covenant vows all clergy make to uphold the Book of Discipline, the decision to maintain language that rejects all non male/female sexual relationships as non-Christian resulted in open rebellion in many annual conferences. The way the issue was handled at the General Conference caused many to question the "Christian" behavior of those who opposed their opinion. Needless to say, the email regarding Grace Fellowship points to a growing split within the United Methodist Church.

But what does this have to do with the scriptures on Sunday? I believe that the Methodist Church is in grave danger of being the Pharisee in the parable. Each side of the debate so busy judging the other that no one will walk away justified. In a world that faces a significant challenge to God's created gift of the Earth and a nation that is letting bigotry, paranoia, and radical causes cut at the very heart of the "United" states, the United Methodist Church has become so polarized to speak the Gospel. How can a denomination which was founded on Wesley's firm belief in love of God and neighbor speak if we can not even love ourselves? How can we remind people of our call to be good stewards of God's creation when we are finding it difficult to be good stewards of our own churches? As Mother Teresa is referenced as saying, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

Maybe it is time we join the tax collector and admit that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. Maybe we should let God be judge and instead learn to listen and follow God's lead. Maybe we should put more stock in listening to the living resurrected Lord than interpreting words from dead men in a language that is no longer used in the same way. Maybe if we humbly pray instead of arguing and judging, God will reveal a more important issue that threatens the souls of His children. It is only when we start with humility and kindness that we can truly begin to let God's love shine through our lives. I have no answers but I know the One who does. Will you join me in waiting and listening to see what God has to say through the Holy Spirit?