

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, October 11, 2015

Psalm 90:12-17

So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O God! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning
with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice
and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days
as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years
as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest
to your servants,
and your glorious power
to their children.

Let the favor of the Sovereign our God
be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands —
O prosper the work of our hands!

Mark 10:17-31

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.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Let us pray....Amen

This morning's reading from our Hebrew Scripture, from the Psalms, is a clear cry from the Psalmist for balance. For a balancing of the good with the bad that one has experienced. For balancing one's attitude toward the challenges of life, so that we might find gladness and gratitude, even for the roughest of days.

'Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.'

The Psalmist knows that even the most evil of days has value for a faithful child of God, if they know how to understand it from the 'big picture' of life.

For example: (Betsy's car story) One view: life stinks, cars stink, car repair shops stink, spending a lot of money on a car stinks. Psalm 90 view: new safe tires, new safe right rear bearing, no worries about a catastrophic failure of either tires or bearing. What good is money anyway if it can't help us be safer, and feel safer.

'Let the favor of the Sovereign God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands- O prosper the work of our hands.

This is not a plea for wealth, but rather a plea that the work we do in our lives, emotional work, spiritual work, physical work, have value. In this context, may the work we do to find gratitude even in the most difficult of circumstances be effective.

And the work we have to do regarding our Gospel passage is daunting.

In a perfect world, we would all be very rich, we would hear this passage, and we would immediately act to sell all we have and give it to Fairmount Community Church United Church of Christ!

But it's not a perfect world, and that's not what this passage is about anyway.

This passage is trying to help us understand what kind of barriers do we have in our lives that will make it difficult for us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. For most of us, it is not wealth. But for the rich young man, in a conversation with Jesus, it *is* his wealth, and in the story, we find that while he has kept all the commandments, when push comes to shove, he is unwilling to part with his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our challenge is to figure out what aspect of our lives might be a sticking point in our own entering of the Kingdom of Heaven. It could be wealth. It could be an unhealthy attachment to something. It could be a behavior trait we rely on to get through our days.

Jesus spoke provocatively, hyperbolically, to shock those who were listening to him. Today, we are listening to him. Are we shocked? It's a little harder to be shocked with so much time and distance between us and Jesus, but if we really look hard inside ourselves, we would probably find at least one aspect of our lives that might be a sticking point in our entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

But in the spirit of Psalm 90, we must look. We must look at our lives and determine whether God's work is manifest in us. Does the narrative of our lives tell the story of God's glory. Has the work of our hands prospered for the glory of God?

Can we look back on the ups and downs of our days, and be thankful for the whole of our lives, both the good and the bad? Do our lives serve as an example of God's love in the world?

If we can't say yes to some of these questions, that's ok. None of us should be able to say yes to all of them. But it means we have a little work to do in order to be able to say yes, and that could be a good goal: That we count our days and gain a wise heart. That we are satisfied in the morning of our

lives, and that we learn to rejoice and be glad in *all* our days. That we see the days that we were or are afflicted as simply part of the whole of our lives, and that we are glad even for the most difficult of times.

That God's work be manifest in all that we do: our daily lives, our faith lives, the way we interact with our family, with our friends, with strangers, with the world.

That we remember to pray that God would prosper the work of our hands: not so that we can have a lot of money, but that the work of our hands be a joyful and abundant example of God's favor and grace.

If our Gospel lesson hints at the challenges we face in ordering our lives in such a way, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God, for God all things are possible', then we have some praying to do. Some praying that God will help us order our lives so that we are thankful for our lives, with all the complications and sorrows that we experience. Some praying that that work of our hands would prosper under the favor of our Sovereign God. Some praying that whatever it is that is preventing us from being able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven be removed.

There is great value in taking some time to look over the life we have led up to this point. A comprehensive review so to speak. When we reflect on our lives, on where we came from, on where we've been, on where we think we are going, we become aware of the places where we feel God has been, and we become aware of places where we feel God has been absent.

We may have followed the commandments to the letter. We may have attended worship for years with perfect attendance. But we now know that when we ask Jesus what else we need to do in order to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, he's going to ask us to sacrifice something that is very near and dear to our hearts. Something that is so ingrained in us, so much a part of us, that we won't know what to do.

Reflecting on what that thing might be will help us put things in spiritual perspective.

Praying this part of Psalm 90 might prepare us for the conversation we might have with ourselves in figuring out what aspect of our lives prevents us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Selling everything we have and giving it to FCC UCC isn't the answer. I wish it was. Then we wouldn't have any budget problems!

As we head into the Stewardship season, I *do* hope each of us will take some time to see where we might be as generous in our giving as God has been generous in our lives. But it will take praying this part of Psalm 90 once, maybe many times, before we might begin to see the incredible generosity and grace that God has bestowed upon all of us.

Jesus doesn't expect us to abandon our families in pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven any more than he expects all of us to sell all our possessions.

But I believe he *does* expect us to look on the whole of our lives through the lens of his parable. If we want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, whatever that means, (and figuring out what the Kingdom of Heaven means is a whole other sermon, believe me!) we are going to have to live our lives like we mean it. We're going to have to make whatever changes are necessary in order for our lives to be in harmony with our spiritual intentions.

Entering the Kingdom of Heaven is difficult for all of us. And for all of us, it will be something different that causes us difficulty.

Let us be bold and courageous in reviewing our faith lives in this way, and let us be bold and courageous in making whatever changes are needed to align our lives with our hopes.

With God, all things are possible. Amen.