

Fourteenth Weekend After Pentecost (B/RCL): "What Have You Done for Me Lately?"

Joshua 24:1-2; John 6:56-69

August 25-26, 2018

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Jesus, fully human as well as fully divine, felt all the human emotions we do. When do you recall or guess He was sad?

- When His neighbors in the Nazareth synagogue tried to push Him off a cliff after He preached there? (Luke 4:28-30)
- When folks in Nazareth had so little faith that "... he could no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them"? (Mark 6:5)
- When His family came to haul Him home because they thought He was nuts? (Mark 3:21)
- Standing before Lazarus' tomb? ("And Jesus wept." John 11:35)
- At the Last Supper when He predicted one of His closest followers would betray Him? (Matthew 26:21)
- Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane? (Matthew 26:38) With friends who couldn't stay awake? (Matthew 26:40)
- In the courtyard when Peter denied knowing Him, the rooster crowed, and He caught Peter's eye? (Luke 22:61)
- In the Praetorium when the soldiers spit on Him? (Mark 15:19)
- On the cross when the leaders, passers-by, and those crucified beside Him mocked Him? (Mark 15:29-32)

I'm thinking our Lord was sad when so many of His disciples beat feet and left His little band after He said they must eat His body and drink His blood. Watching them peel off and head elsewhere,

*Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" (John 6:67)*

He's reminding them, "You **have** a choice, people! Whom do you choose?"

The first lesson from Joshua goes along perfectly with today's Gospel. Joshua basically says the same thing to the people traveling with him into Canaan:

*"Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)*

The people whom Joshua addressed had personal memories of or had heard loved ones talk about the Exodus from Egypt and the 40 year journey through the wilderness. They certainly had firsthand knowledge of entering the Promised Land with Joshua after Moses stayed behind and died on Mount Nebo before crossing the River Jordan. They recounted that impressive, not-so-distant salvation history to Joshua, then answered:

*"...we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."* (Joshua 24:18)

Peter and the other Eleven apostles had seen Jesus work wonders. They had seen Jesus' ministry with their own eyes and heard His words with their own ears, so Peter answers the Lord's question, *"Do you also wish to go away?"* like this:

*"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* (John 6:68-69)

'Should sound familiar, because those words are sometimes part of our Gospel acclamation.

We don't literally hear the Lord asking us, *"Do you also wish to go away?"* Maybe it would be better if we did. Instead, we are tempted away from worship by the world's distractions and we are led astray, veering off the path of life in baby steps, "nibbling ourselves lost" as one person has said.

There's something called "the call girl principle." It means that the value of a service rendered decreases as time passes. I feel less grateful the further I get from someone performing a favor for me. It's like we stand in front of the crucifix and ask, "But what have You done for me lately??" Shocking. Near blasphemous. And of course we'd never **say** that, but sometimes we act like we don't remember the Gift Given in our Lord's life, death and resurrection. Or like it has somehow diminished in value over the past two thousand years. We live like we are free to trim our own sails and head in whatever direction we want. We live like we're free agents, with any

choice we make being justifiable. We forget that we “have been bought with a price.” That the heart of Christianity isn’t a set of rules; it’s a relationship with our Redeemer.

On Passover our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate **their current** liberation from all that enslaves them and not just their **ancestors’ past** liberation from slavery in Egypt. Likewise, each time we eat the Lord’s Body and drink the Lord’s Blood in Holy Communion, as He commanded, we receive these Gifts “given and shed” **for us**. God’s love raining down, cascading from Heaven falls upon **us**. God’s forgiveness is for **us**. God feeds, forgives, welcomes, **us**.

When I hold up the bread and lift up the chalice at the altar, repeating our Lord’s words, “Do this to remember Me,” I wonder, “Lord, are you **really** worried we’ll forget?? How **could** we forget?” Then I have the sad little thought, the startling realization that sometimes I **do** forget.... Despite my commitment that “I will serve the Lord,” despite my assertion to Jesus, “I do **not** wish to go away,” despite my conscious desire to love God above all else and my neighbor as myself, sometimes I forget. My actions, my words, don’t always reflect Christ-like love. And so I imbibe the Word and approach the altar as often as I can, because it is here that I receive the promised gifts of life, forgiveness and salvation.

The answer to “What have You done for me lately?” could fill a book, no less a sermon. Each breath we draw is a gift from God. Each dawn we see, each day we greet is Heaven-sent. Each new beginning we make, despite and sometimes **because** of painful endings, is only possible by God’s grace. Each time we recognize and reach out to Christ in the last, the lost, least, is only because the Holy Spirit has granted us holy in-sight to see the world from God’s perspective. We do have a choice, where to be. It is here that we confess we are sinners and rejoice that we have a Savior. “It is good, Lord, to be here.” Amen

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