

November 15, 2020

“The Big Lie”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus said:] "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

"Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.

For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

SERMON: “The Big Lie”

Most of you all know I was raised in a time and faith tradition that saw scripture as the inerrant word of God. When I or others pointed out contradictions and how reading the Bible like history was very problematic, they would make up excuses for it like one does for a family member who is a good guy when he is sober, but just isn’t sober very often.

Before the invention of the printing press, most people didn’t have access to the scriptures so when we all finally got it, we Protestants especially made a huge deal over it. So much so that entire denominations, entire wars, entire towns and cultures were built up around a particular way to interpret scripture.

Many of our ancestors crossed an entire ocean to be able to interpret scripture in the way that they were taught was the “only” or “right” way to read it. In other words, we began to worship God less, trust the Holy Spirit less and worship the scriptures more.

In my opinion this was as much idolatry as those very people considered praying to a statue or to saints.

Now don’t get me wrong, kudos to my ancestors in faith for their passion and faith but here is the problem... we know better, yet we keep doing it. And ministers are the worst. Because their livelihoods have often depended on not rocking the boat too much, for centuries now they have just continued to pretend that the scriptures don’t sometimes perpetuate inequalities and beliefs we no longer want in ourselves, our culture and our churches.

I was so drawn to the UCC slogan. God is still speaking. We choose not to shackle God to ancient texts of a people of that time or place just trying to make sense of life and spirit.

These two scriptures that we have in our lectionary this morning are very problematic for today's society and the fact that we keep on reading them and glossing them over to mean something good is part of the problems we are facing today.

The Thessalonians’ reading pretty much says that we must stay awake and stay perfect in every moment because God could appear out of nowhere, judge us, and rain down destruction on our heads and cause us as much pain as childbirth does. So live in fear folks as if we don’t have enough to be afraid of right now.

The parable in Mathew perpetuates slavery, entitlement, punishment, yet is often used as stewardship scripture to show us that it’s better to take risks and live in abundance than just hold on to our money. Not bad points but we have to start owning it all or we will just continue as an

institution to perpetuate violence and inequality through that incredibly harmful act of just pretending there is nothing wrong.

There is something wrong with berating someone for a bad decision, for calling him worthless, for owning him in the first place, for setting him up to fail, for being such a jerk that he is afraid of you in the first place and for casting him off into a place of violence. This is not how I understand Jesus's life and ministry that was based on the Rule of Love.

I am not saying we do away with any scriptures, I am saying that we have to stop pretending that we have not freeze dried 1st century patriarchy, racism, homophobia, anti-semitism, violence and entitlement and shipped them straight to us today.

We can find the good in them but that good will always be tainted if we don't say out loud what is wrong with them too.

So there was absolutely nothing uplifting about what I just said so I will leave you with something good to think about, now that we have unpacked, and investigated what harm these passages can cause.

It is this, in both scriptures we have this notion of "security" called into question as it should be. In Thessalonians it reads, "When they say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them". And in the parable of the talents we see the slave that acted fearfully to protect, hold on to what he had, is the one that suffers.

At a time when our security feels threatened by this pandemic it does not hurt to remember that being secure is always a lie we tell ourselves to keep calm and carry on. It's a lie that is used often to manipulate us to think from fear and not faith.

Too many of us know first hand that everything can change at the drop of a hat. But here is what we have come to know as well through all those moments of great insecurity we came to recognize where our security truly comes from. It comes from God, our strength and our shield.

Our awareness of God's presence with us may vary from day to day but God does not move away from us. There is nothing on earth, no amount of riches or reputation, no amount of social justice, calm or superiority, or peace, no amount of material goods or admiration that can even begin to scratch the surface of the security that we can find in God, our rock and our redeemer.

A decade from now when we look back, and somebody asks, how did you make it through 2020, may you all be able to say that it was the strength and resilience that comes only from God that got us all through, that pulled us together and made as strong as a church, as families and as individuals. May you find security in that this day and all the days ahead. AMEN.

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