

July 12, 2020

**“Jesus at the Lake House”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Scripture Reading:
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

"Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

So Jesus is actually at a lake house. So far that day he has rejected his family, done some healings, a couple of exorcisms, preached and taught and preached some more... not your average day at the lake. Right. He has got to be exhausted.

So he leaves the house, walks down to the lake. Doesn't that bring a good feeling to most of us who have ever spent a day at a lake house.

Just wanting to go down to the water and chill, maybe fish a little, get some sun, drink something cold, skip some stones, watch the way the sunlight dances on the water. What a way to recover from such a busy and emotionally draining day with so many needy people.

But the people don't leave him alone, matter of fact they crowd in on him so much he has to get in a boat so he can socially distance himself from them. Just kidding! :) He just needed to back up from the throng so he could breathe and be heard.

And he starts all over again with the preaching and the teaching. I would be really irritated at this point if I were him. I would be like, you guys are scaring my fish away, and busting my vibe, I have given all I can give for the day, come back tomorrow, my office hours are from 1-4.

But Jesus just keeps on going... He must have been so energetic and so charismatic, to attract such a crowd. But then he starts talking in riddles. What the heck is he talking about? Good soil? rocky soil? thorny soil?

If Jesus was giving a Ted talk this one would have bombed right there. But something keeps the crowd interested.

Some say that he spoke in parables so he could get away with saying things against the religious leaders and Romans because he was doing it in some kind of code. But Marcus Borg described it like this:

“The parables of Jesus function in a particular way; they are invitational forms of speech. Jesus used them to invite his hearers to see something they might not otherwise see. As evocative forms of speech, they tease the imagination into activity, suggest more than they say, and invite a transformation in perception.”

In other words they make you think and help to change your perspective. When we engage at this level, when we have to think about something, we grow the brain matter we need to form connections. We grow in our ability to think for ourselves, to hear things deeply and connect the words of Jesus with current events.

Like if Jesus said “I was thirsty and you gave me drink” maybe the thinking brain would spark a connection, thinking maybe we should stand against laws that dirty our waters, or that force our border patrols to arrest good samaritans, or leave water in the desert so that people who cross over do not die from thirst.

As many of you know most of my career has been dedicated to pastoral care as a chaplain. This is always going to be the place I am most comfortable with, sitting and listening to what's going on with you, letting you know that I am here for you through the good and the bad. Being a non-judgmental presence in your life.

I really do think that is the most important part of a call to ministry. I'd like to make sure you know that you can trust me to care about you no matter what your political beliefs or how much you give to the church.

So I don't ever want what I say up here to upset you to the point that you don't talk to me when something is on your heart out there.

That you don't call me when you are struggling, or let me know when you have lost somebody, or you have something going on medically.

But what I say up here is also a very important part of being a minister. By definition it is supposed to occasionally challenge, occasionally inspire, provoke, cajole, teach and prod-- especially in the long tradition that this church was founded in and remains in.

A centuries old tradition where it is believed that in God's eyes, in the kingdom of God everybody is equal and everybody is worthy of God's GRACE, FORGIVENESS, REDEMPTION, and LOVE. Loving our neighbor, being our brother and sisters keeper, they are paramount to our tradition.

Now, I firmly believe in separation of church and state even when others don't respect that. It was a genius, unique idea that was born out of centuries of religious wars and persecution of and by all faiths and denominations. Many of your ancestors in this very church came to America to rid themselves of governments that told them what they should believe and how they should practice their faith.

I believe it is one of the greatest cornerstones of this nation. A nation that I love and was willing to lay my life down for. So when my patriotism is called into question because I believe we can do better for people of color, for people who are poor, for people who are sick, then I get my back up.

But I will still try and be apolitical up here, But I will not be amoral up here and at this point in our country those lines have been severely blurred.

Like say if I preach about being truthful, because Jesus says that the truth sets you free, that puts me in direct contradiction and conflict to the current culture and politics because in the media and in politics lying has become norm, it is business as usual.

That was not the way I was brought up, or the way you were brought up or how we brought up my kids.

And I was not raised to call people names, or to make fun of them in any way, and my kids know better too and I'm sure that you do too.

But what we are seeing right now is that it has become okay to be hateful to the stranger, to cough into people's faces if they wear a mask. To treat entire groups of people as sub-human, a practice I naively thought we had outgrown.

We are living in a society that suffers from incredible selfishness and self centeredness and caring for the common good of our people, being a good citizen is a language of the past and it happened while most of us weren't even paying attention.

I learned a term in the Service called “tin-canning” I’m sure all of you have seen it on the movies where you throw a rock or can far away from your location to throw off your opponent, to draw their fire so you know where their location is. That tin canning has happened to our faith.

As leaders threw us off of real Christian Values by focusing on “the sanctity of marriage” or arguing over a woman’s right to choose, or whether or not corporations are humans, on and on, we didn’t notice that the basic building blocks of a decent human, a decent christian were no longer in fashion.

Honesty, Fidelity, Compassion, Forgiveness, Empathy, Keeping your word, Caring for our neighbor. Where are those values now in our national dialogues, where are they in today’s “news” cycles?

Parables make us think, God wants us to be thinking beings, the ONLY time we are to be sheep is when we are following God, NOT a particular religious leader, or celebrity and certainly not our political leaders.

We have become sheep of cable news, sheep of our particular parties, sheep of our particular leaders, sheep of advertisers, sheep of Facebook. Sheep of our fear of speaking out against bullies.

Sheep of our fear of conflict. Sheep of our fears, egos, security and our arrogance. Folks, there is only one Shepherd we should be following.

The Shepherd that told us to love our neighbor, to welcome the stranger to care for the widow and orphans, To feed the hungry, clothe the naked and give water to the thirsty. to reach out to the outcast, the oppressed, to speak truth to power and question religious practices that distract us from what matters.

To eschew haughty leaders who think they know everything and who do everything for show. And to be peacemakers and healers, Yet here we are. In a nation where still 65% of the population identifies as Christian -- those things all make me sound like a bleeding heart.

I will try to be apolitical but I can not be amoral. In this time in our history we are being called to use our heads and our hearts, to be the thinking and feeling creatures that God created us to be.

WHEW! On a lighter note, well kind of:

We have been gardening at home a lot lately and enjoying it. We found this particularly good organic, well composted soil-- and plants just seem to take off in it. So I really understand what Jesus is talking about in this parable.

We are to be the good soil, right? But what I have also noticed about our soil that is so good is that weeds take off just as fast.

So that brings me to another scripture in Galatians 6:7-8. You reap what you sow. This one is a little dark, but hey it has been that kind of year right? It reads:

“You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.

I can plant the good stuff and get the good stuff but something is also sowing weeds in my good soil, it's my job to pull them out when that happens.

I can try and deny that they are there... but they will still overtake my garden.
I can blame it on the birds dropping weed seeds... but the weeds will still overtake my garden.
I can blame it on the guy who sold me the soil.. and they will still overtake my garden.
Or I can just go in the house and whine about how I am a victim to all the stupid weeds and that soil didn't used to be that way... but they will still overtake my garden.

UNLESS I just do the work and pull those suckers out by the roots.

What are humans sowing? What have we sown in our history that needs pulling out by the roots? I know what cable news is sowing. I know what our political leaders are sowing. I know what hate radio and shallow neighbors and selfish, irresponsible people are sowing. And I know what those people who are hiding their inability to think outside themselves behind a banner of freedom are sowing.

But what are you sowing? Where are you sowing it? For the most part, at least on my good days I have been trying to sow love, even with people I strongly disagree with. But man it sometimes feels like I am casting my seed into the rocky, thorny shallow!

But thankfully, in the parable of the sower Jesus doesn't criticize the sower for bad aim, he is just saying when you are sowing, some seeds are going to land in good soil and some aren't. But our job is just keep casting those seeds and keep pulling those weeds.

I know, I will always know that I am preaching to the choir here at Parkside, but I hope that in your hearing and listening, that you are inspired to keep casting, keep casting those seeds of the kingdom of God. Seeds of love, compassion, hope and kindness in a world that seems to be running a little low on all those things lately. Just keep casting and don't give up. AMEN

Copyright 2020 Rev. Susan Drake
All Rights Reserved

