

Sermon for Sunday, 26 July, 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 18:31-33,44-52

Sermon: We start out today's Bible readings with more details about the family of Abraham and its successive generations. The point of this is not so clear, except that it's in the book, and from long experience most of the church has decided the rest of our story needs it, just like everybody needs to know about our pasts and our family histories.

The Psalm says this in its own way. You start with "Praise the Lord!" and end there if you're on solid ground, we believe. Until you can accept your past and be both kind and hopeful, you're in serious trouble. God ... the source of everything and all its connections... has got to be both in charge, and adoring. "Praise the Lord!" is the first and last fact. Amen.

Then, out of the blue, we get this converted policeman, this ICE officer, Paul, coming clean with the wildest, dreamiest outlook anybody who's not crazy could ever put together. He says all those holes in things, all those storm-rolls and empty spaces we thought were full of supplies and safety-nets.... he says those things are busting and groaning with what's coming because of God's super-energy and God's long-term generosity. This fellow Jesus is the one fact that connects everything. Christ is both completely us and totally God. It's taken this long, and we're the first ones to get the full hint of its reality. How that works out for us here and now is pure sublimity. Spirit is in everything, and Spirit is totally reliable and totally beyond our control. Just hang on, just trust, and you'll glimpse and begin to grasp how gorgeous, how sound and trustworthy, love is, and reality pans out to be.

That's the center of today's point in scripture for today. The Gospel reading is just examples of what Paul's talking about. One way and another, Matthew's illustrations just trace out examples of this at work in our ordinary days and nights. A tiny seed that grows into a shade-tree; treasure a man found in a field and buried back and went and bought the whole field it was hidden in; fish-net that practically breaks with the weight of its catch when you hang it over the side for a moment

and pull it back in, full; clean-up staff that ... because Matthew is so hooked on consequences that he risks overstating his conclusions, as far as I can see, when he describes the scribes, the book-keepers and accountants that sweep up and sum up every room and moment of reality.

It's a high-flying group of lessons today. Sometimes we serving-girls and handy-men go overboard in our descriptions. Sometimes mercy gets pushed aside by enthusiasm and we use the language of the old days that puts love slightly left of the center of things for emphasis. But take it for real, the Good News is here, and we are not only in its center, but we carry the light of it and the scent of it wherever we stand and all the places we head

" Praise the Lord!"

Amen. -