

Sermon for 29 August 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus.”

I’m having a hard time forgiving our President. “We will hunt you down and make you pay,”

What kind of leadership is that? Where is Jesus Christ in that?

Let us pray. Dear God, bring America back to the leadership it has at times so powerfully demonstrated. Specifically, send a rush of Spirit across this land like that which made the French donate the Statue of Liberty, and led Emma Lazarus to pen the words, “Give me your tired, your poor...” Bring the Spirit that led us to create and host the United Nations, and to produce the Marshall Plan after World War II. As we survey so many of our mistakes these days, give us the gumption and the grace to draw together a great rush of energy and cooperation that will help rebuild the devastated people of Afghanistan. Give us all together the basic follow-through that will show humankind cooperating for the common good. Let our common aim be education, freedom, economic health and medical care. Give all who join ... and let there be many, from many lands ... an ennobling sense of creating justice and honoring diversity of religion, political history, different customs, and the awful damage we can do to one another. Specifically, give Biden more good advisors, curb his temper, bind and gag the Republicans until they learn to play well with others, and give us all some way to put away all use of drones. Now! Amen.

Whew! It’s that bad. We’re in trouble, folks. This is like WAR ... and we all know war is impossible in Christ, not to be considered ever, ever again. Global warming, nuclear energy, and human selfishness are too obvious, from America to everywhere else, known immediately, absolutely unendurable.

These beautiful scriptures we start with have everything from poetry to clear-eyed acceptance of SEX in all its forms. They’ve been used to represent the human capacity to worship both male and female divinity, to stand for Christ and the church, and all sorts of appearances of feminine and masculine energy in everything, through the ages. Right now we know the masculine domination of most power has been a great drag on the past 2,000 years or so of human history. We start with that. Women and men have both masculine and feminine sides, both essential to wholeness But we have a lot to overcome to make this a good world energetically. Thank God we have some help in scripture, such as today’s first lesson and psalter lesson.

As for James, he gets a hard rap from folks like Luther, who called him “a gospel of straw,” but then, Luther had his hang-ups with authority all by himself, and plenty of other Christians have been hard on James’s practical, down-to-earth approach to Jesus and the church. “Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only” isn’t a bad rule of thumb, in prayer and marriage,

international affairs and playing with animals and babies alike ... as well as at the office. His insistence that everything good comes straight from God is pretty sound, too, in case we get stuck up ... or down on ourselves, for that matter. If you feel bad, you're out of touch with God ... sounds brutal, but I've found it encouraging me to get to the bottom of a sadness, sickness, abuse, indebtedness, and many other things.

Jesus is harsh today, back to Mark as we are. No more bread and blood talk ... just "You focus wrong," to the religious people who want rules and certificates for everything. We could have spent the whole sermon just on this ... but the old hymn said it all for me this week. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." I'd like to sum up with Leroy helping us sing hymn 349 ... not in sentimentalism, but in the gratitude we as Christians have for this whole idea that God is us, God knows as we know, God is as close as these pictures we've been mercifully granted over the centuries and in the personalities and practices of "the Way," Church, fellowship coming from God and going back to God through circuitry that lives in you and passes through me and keeps us together even in our loneliness ... God seen through a glass, darkly, but now and then face to face, never to be lost, human and divine, where we can touch "Turn your eyes upon Jesus....."

Amen.