

Sermon for 16 July 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112 (*Alternate Leader/people*); Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

"This, too..."

How many of you think that avoiding something unpleasant makes it worse?

I won't bore you with personal details ... recent ones ... but that's my experience.

All my anxiety reactions show up.

Irritability. Forgetfulness. Really gloomy daydreams.

Maybe that's why I think that was what Jesus was getting at in today's parable.

I don't think he was praising the people who got a 100% return on their investment..

Neither do I think he was saying you shouldn't try to succeed, or that talent and good breaks don't matter.

I think he is just telling us that for all our plans, and all our efforts to provide for our children, and all the programs we develop to give people an equal playing field, we don't take care of everything.

Life is still uncertain.

And back to my first point, you can learn, sixty years after the fact, that the attitude of a parent had an influence you never knew on a whole generation

These days it seems like such insight is coming from so many directions.

Everything needs to be reworked.,

We even hear that sometimes in scripture. Read the Book of Ecclesiastes if you think I'm overstating things; or hear Job tell God off, with good reason - or look at today's first lesson, where Jacob tricks his brother Esau out of his birthright, at his mother Rebekah's insistence --- Rebekah, who was so brave and cooperative with God's plan for building a special people. And the text ends today with the judgmental word to Esau: "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Sounds pretty unfair to me.

We develop some pretty unhealthy mechanisms when we don't face unpleasant details. It would be a lot better if we'd looked squarely at them a long time ago ... or even known them!

But then, the Lord says ... “There’s this, too...”

We need to remember that we can do some good before we know the full story.

It’s a real mystery. As someone said recently, “It’s the whole show, not just the part we know, or the part we’d have faced if we’d seen it earlier.”

There’s “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.”

Let us pray.

Help us, Lord, to hold fast to what is good, even before we fully know what we are doing.

And when your facts appear to us, even if with great pain, make us brave enough to obey and build upon them.

Amen.