

Sermon for 23 July 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12.23-24 (*Use insert*); Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

“Seriously.”

We're deep in the jungle of “Ordinary time” in the church’s annual calendar of Bible readings now. What we thought would be serious discussion has turned into a crazy mix of family history, psalm cheers and moans, church arguments, and parables.

And in the meantime, the world is full of bombs and bullets, border patrol, political posturing, and hot, hot, hot!

There’s got to be a theme somewhere!

And sure enough, leave it to Jesus: there is.

Hidden growth.

God isn’t finished, with us or anything else. Great things are happening. Important work is going on all the time; but from our point of view, it’s always unfinished business.

We old folks are partial to completion. After all, we’ve seen a lot; and, we can’t lift as much as we used to. Small moves are our specialty ... and, when we’re at our best, encouragement for the young ones, and an understanding word for those in the middle of the fray, carrying heavy burdens. We know and understand.

But that little bud beside us is bright; and beneath everything, the ground is moving ... and remember when all this familiar territory was still vacant, open land? A lot of harm can still be done ... and so can a lot of good. Right now, all of us, all ages, all conditions, can see different things than before. Things need fixing. Good news needs telling. And, standards need setting, as well. Fairness must be upheld, and that takes strong arms and solid faith.

What we try to do, God help us, in this weekly connection we make so faithfully, so hopefully, so prayerfully, is honor that mystery of growth that’s going on all the time when we’re off in our different valleys, weeding and planting and holding on.

It’s a beautiful thing. We look quite ordinary. We carry one candle at a time. We come, and we go; but underneath, and around, and outside this circle, a process never ceases.

Thank God we know enough to believe that, and trust it, and pray for it, the rest of the week. Like Jesus, headed for trouble, and believing in glory, we ask each other to keep the faith. Keep on keeping on. Can you see it in our eyes? Feel it in our touch? Hear it in our singing?

It's a process. It's a hoping. It's love, in all kinds of shapes and ways. It's us, and yet it's 'way beyond us. It's just real enough to snag us, week by week, until look how long we've been here! Remember those who kept it going until we got here? Blessings on all of us!

I think we often make too much of sin. Jesus died to save us from our sins; but Jesus was always more interested in the good going on all around, in the sparrow, and the coin, and the child, and the woman bent over who just couldn't keep from touching after all those years, and who stood up, alive and testifying in the crowd at last.

We are here because of great things going on. Never let go of that, until it's the right time, and the next part is ready for you, and all of us, to step into what that is.

Seriously.

Hallelujah.

Amen.