

Sermon for 9 July 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45:10-17 (*Insert: Alternate leader/people*);

Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

“For you”

I listened to the new pastor @ Lovely Lane, mother church of American Methodism, on zoom, giving his first sermon of his new appointment there.

A young Black man ... the first ... he was outstanding. His gratitude for the honor of this pulpit, his sincere openness to the congregation's concerns and commitments, his gratitude to the Bishop and the District Superintendent...our D.S. too, who has preached to us and supported us in our work together ... and most of all, his focus on the scripture of the day that spoke of the importance of even the smallest act of generosity among ourselves ...”even the giving of a cup of cold water to one of these little ones,” as the quotation reads ... all made for an inspiring and truly “on target” message, both for himself and for the congregation, at the pivotal opening moment.

It was good to be inspired by a young colleague, standing in a highly significant position, at a memorable moment.

It encouraged me to trust our own inspiration and commitment here at Bethesda. Last Sunday we had exceptionally good attendance @ our “One Church” monthly gathering after the 10:30 service, and made some strong commitments to on-going and new projects. We also were kind to one another, and prayed for one another both prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for healing in serious individual moments of on-going life matters. It was especially important to hear, and say to one another, as pastor and congregation did @ Lovely Lane, that the least cup of encouragement and touch of support shared was right up to the top of meaning in our lives --- God is in the midst, the thick, of that spiritual reality, day in and year out.

What Pastor Sutton did, in essence, was to take a complex and varied set of assigned scriptures and lift up one that had most poignant significance, and let it reign over the whole service. It wasn't that other points weren't heard, but rather that one struck home for that moment and vibrated for the whole set in a kind of united encouragement for us all in our different positions.

I'd like to do that today, given our long experience with each other and our many special concerns, fears, hopes, and capacities to trust and grow.

For me, what stands out today is the final section of the Gospel reading, in which Matthew has Jesus say, in a moment of high conflict, with plenty of tension evident between those who think alike and those who, quite openly, think against his teaching and power. Not only does he speak to this situation, but he goes beyond it, as we have come to hear and believe as followers of this God-human who brings the whole power of spiritual energy home for us. He says, quite simply, it is easy, it is light, it is suited for your ability to handle individually and together. “It is

for you” that God has come through me into and among you. This is the news. This is all of the news. This is what you need to hear, and what we will grow into together.”

I believe this is truth, individually for every one of us, and I believe it is truth we are already aware of, already sharing. Each of us has a special grasp and a group of gifts that are made to work together.

Let us pray: Lord help us hear the words, “This is for you,” with especial clarity as we start a new appointment year together. Help us look at it as fresh and clear of old times, even as we gratefully acknowledge you have brought lots together through us over the past. Make this summer, with all its surprises and strains, the only one that matters now; and help us truly hear, in all the depth of meaning and encouragement these words have for us individually and as a living body of believers, “This is for you.” This faith, this fellowship, this history, this new ability, along with these long-familiar skills we each possess, are for us to enjoy, and share, and trust as straight from you, through all our history with you, and leading to all the glory up ahead for each and all of us, with you, for all before, and all that are to come. Amen.