

Sermon for 9 June 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 8:4-20 (11:14-15); Psalm 138 (UM 853); 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3 :20-35

Sermon :

I apologize for the confusion in the 10:30 bulletin about the first lesson. Last Sunday night I astonished Charles Melchior by producing the bulletin for the coming Sunday (this Sunday, in other words) literally on the same Sunday as I preached. The fact was that I was so tired from Annual Conference and two concerts with the New Wave Singers that I overlooked the second part of the reading from 1 Samuel until I actually sat down to prepare today's sermon. I will say it worked out fine, not only because Charles got a chance to razz me two weeks in a row, since I'd worked the same wonder the week before, but also because I just preached a prayer for the second service, knowing Laura had taken excellent notes and did a bang-up job of reporting both details and mood of this year's Annual Conference.

All the extra verses of 1 Samuel do is extend the comments about kingship that he represents for all time. Basically, the threat of Philistine victory over Israel pushed kingship for a whole period of Israel's history, and gave us the facts of life in the world as it so far has always been. Once people get going together, sooner or later they try organized power at some time or other.

Our psalm for today just gives a clear vote for trusting God, whether we have a king or not, or are a king or not (some verses sound like David, the representative king for all Israelites and all the rest of us who serve under some rule, everywhere, always: "On the day when I called, you answered me;" "the Lord will fulfill (the Lord's) his purpose for me;" "Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands."

Our letter from the early Church talks basic truth to believers: We follow Jesus, Jesus lives even beyond the body, however that works out in our experience following him, and so shall we. "For we know that, if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The simple beauty of this trust never ceases to make its point, here in the body, time and time again, thanks to God's grace working in each of us. It's a mantra, which we call on to help us in all sorts of times.

The Gospel lesson is brutally frank. Jesus knows too much, does too much, helps too many people. Religious leaders ... of his own Jewish religion ... say he works by Satan. He answers that doesn't make sense, to say the bad energy does good things. Mark gives him a speech that always feels awkward, saying everyone who sins can be forgiven, "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin." His family went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'he has gone out of his mind.'" This gets quite painful, for he even insists he belongs to, goes with, "those who do the will of God"...

Remember the season we're in now? "Ordinary time." My life. Your life. American life. The world we live in now. Not what we planned, at least in our good seasons. The yin and the yang, the soil and the seed...dying and being born anew.

This is preaching, working it out day by day, coming back by sheer grace of God and not our own energy. This is how it gets better. This is growth in the good sense, no matter how it stacks up against the powers that be.

No matter how things change. This is the story. This is the glory. This is the truth.

In Jesus Christ we stick with the crowds that come, and depart with the healing that continues to keep us alive until the mystery works its loving purpose in full.

Thank God.

Thank you, Jesus.

Amen.