

Sermon for 8 September 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalter: (*Insert* "Alternate leader and **people**) {Psalm 125; James 2:1-17; Mark 7:24-37

Last week we were in love, with the Song of Solomon. Today we're on solid ground, with the Book of Proverbs.

Last week we said desire is good, the gift of a loving God. This Sunday we say God is not only good. God is fair.

The awesome thing is, to us twenty-first century Americans, that sounds like we're talking out of both sides of our mouth. You have to look out for yourself. The whole system is founded on making something of yourself, and then holding onto it. That's what the stock market tells us. That's what our weapons stockpile stands for. How many times have you heard a politician say, "I'm watching out for the interests of the American people."?

That's what Jesus said. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin... "

"He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet."

What if you fall in love with a Syrophenician woman? In almost every church I've served, there's been a couple that's been bi... I guess you'd say, bi-church. One of them's been Roman Catholic, and the other, Methodist....and they've made it work. Here it was Betty ... and still is, Audrey ...

The Lord is forever playing with our emotions and our divisions. Anybody who's been married, or tried to be, or simply been around for any length of time, knows that. You don't get to choose attraction, or a whole list of circumstances and events and ...

You have to make it work or maybe better said, you have to work with God to make life real over the long haul.

Things are set up that way. Listen: "But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'"

Listen to Proverbs: "Do not rob the poor because they are poor,
or crush the afflicted at the gate,
for the Lord pleads their cause

and despoils of life those who despoil them.”

Then hear that Letter of James we’re reading from for several Sundays: “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

It’s relentless. And the psalm for today just can’t help itself: “Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts; But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways, the Lord will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel.” From the beginning, we just can’t keep from reminding God what God’s job is; and we can’t give up reminding ourselves, either. That’s what worship, and prayer, and self-discipline, are all for.. It’s *hard* for us to believe love is the total sum of things and that’s the way God set it up, and the way God works it out... “And God saw it, and it was good,” as Genesis insists. Right from the start.

And right down to here and now.

God is not just fair.

God is love.

“Then he said to her, ‘For saying that, you may go --- the demon has left your daughter.’ And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.”

Let us pray.

God, help us to believe this, and see nothing else really matters. Develop in us the power to work at this one thing with you. All the time.

Amen, Lord Jesus.

Amen.