

"How Will Jesus Find Us?" CHC

Old Testament, Isaiah 1:10-18

New Testament, Luke 12:32-40

Our desires define us. They create pathways throughout our lives seeking fulfillment. Unexamined, we may end up in places we would rather not. The rich fool Eric preached about last week followed his desires, relishing his accomplishments, pursuing his compelling desire to build bigger barns, and the security and satisfaction he believed would result. His was the ultimate unexamined life.

The worst thing that may happen to us in life is to get what we want. As a young adult I experienced the desire to achieve, to pursue my own self-interests, and to build a life that I thought would bring satisfaction and security. Even in early ministry years I offered my desire to God to be called as pastor of the First Presbyterian church in Helena, Montana, settle down, and build a life in my home state that I love. But things weren't working out. I was dragging my heels. I wanted this to be my call and place of ministry. Both God and Betty were not on my wave length, however. Circumstances clearly were not lining up. The path was leading to Oakland, California, not Montana.

Years earlier when seeking God's direction for my life a comment Paul makes to the Corinthians caught my attention. He tells them that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit "within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own. For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1Corinthians 6:19-20). Our lives in God's economy are not our own to do with as we please.

God seeks to shape the focus of our hearts and lives. A foreshadowing of life as I have come to experience it was in play, and still is. I am still trying to settle in Montana. But whether that happens at all is secondary to what God is asking me to do at any given moment. I have learned that God is my portion, not a place. So I have learned to sit loose with my desires exclusively, but also not to deny them. After all, God does have the ability to converge our desires with Gods as we seek to align our purposes with what God wants.

The writer of Hebrews points out that God's prophets throughout Israel's history "died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). And so we are.

Welcome to Jesus' world. Distancing himself and his followers from temporal worries and concerns, things like food, clothing, the proclivity to worry about everything and the striving life imposes upon us, Jesus directs us to life in the present and future kingdom of God. Acknowledging the power of temporal needs to claim our attention and hearts, Jesus reminds us that God really is aware of that attraction. "Instead, strive for his kingdom and those things will be given you as well".

The reality is that we are afraid of losing something that only God can give. The bible assumes God's generous goodness, beginning with Genesis. Walter Brueggemann observes that the first chapter of Genesis "tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, 'It is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good. It declares that God blesses" (Homiletics, Sept.-Oct., 2016, p.59).

Recently while away I became acutely aware of how God desires to bless. That is God's nature. So why do I find reasons to sabotage and push away what God wants to give? Is it because I don't feel worthy and project my guilt on God, or whatever negative feeling that I might conjure up? God's blessings require a response. We can either push those blessings away as though we don't deserve them or open our hands to receive God's blessings and gifts, discovering anew the overflowing goodness of God all around us.

How easy to miss those blessings and only see scarcity. We want more money, more time, bigger barns, more energy, more resources, missing what Brueggemann calls "the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit". Doesn't the acknowledgement and reception of God's blessings inspire trust in God's provision for us?

Rainer Maria Rilke, in "Letters to a Young Poet" challenges us to look at ourselves and be honest. "If your daily life seems poor, do not blame it; blame yourself, tell yourself that you are not poet enough to call forth its riches; for to the creator there is no poverty and no indifferent place" (Homiletics, p.62).

It is from the heart of God's blessing that Jesus tells us, "Do not be afraid, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". Buy stock in that kingdom. Here nothing gets stolen, rusts, or wears out, for all that God gives is unfailing. It doesn't disappoint. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". So why do we allow our hearts to embrace counterfeit treasures?

Jesus acknowledges the tension we live in as we anticipate God's kingdom and endure present realities. We live in a world where hope, faith, and love are required. Our hope lies in anticipation of Christ's return and the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". He uses the image of waiting for the master to return from the wedding banquet ready to open the door when he knocks. Jesus is stressing the importance of patience and readiness. "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour". The focus is upon how we are to live within the certainty of Christ's return and the uncertainty of its timing.

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit...Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes". What is significant here is what Jesus says next; "Truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them". Remaining attentive to Jesus' presence through his Spirit and appropriating his heart to serve inspire and inform how we live as we look forward to God's consummation of all things.

This text would have startled the people reading it. The master of the house waits at table? God's faithful should behave as household servants? Jesus continuously overturns conventional social norms calling us by example to do so as well.

We are being led into engagement, not withdrawal from our world, as the values of the coming kingdom impact how we live. This is a far cry from Harper Lee's comment in "To Kill a Mockingbird". Lee writes, "Sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whisky bottle in the hand of another...There are just some kind of men who...who're so busy worrying about the next world they've

never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results" (Homiletics, p.55).

The question is, how will Jesus find us? We are being invited to live into God's vision and promise, alert and patient, not into some wishful thinking. So how do we cope in those moments when death is knocking and life appears in all its darkness to engulf us and injustice lies around every corner? How can we appropriate God's blessings and live life in such a world?

I recall Martin Luther King's comment years ago. "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land" (Sojourners, August, 2016, p.56). We all need to ask God for the gift of hope and faith to trust in "the glory of the coming of the Lord".

The present is an opportunity for faithful service reflecting the nature of Jesus' servant heart. There is a relationship between our present vigilance and our future rewards and punishment. Jesus is saying that it matters how we live in this world. It matters what we do and don't do.

E.B. White writes, "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day". That is the tension we live in. As we deal with the realities of so much injustice, refugees, war, terrorism, political graft and failings, I like what Katharine Preston reflects. She writes that "Working for justice is a state of heart, not a category or an issue. And if it is a state of heart, then there should be no conflict between enjoying the world while improving it" (Sojournors, p.45).

Jesus is our host this morning as we come to his table to receive the gifts of God for you and me, the people of God. They are given to sustain us, to keep us alert and engaged as we go through this life. Through them, we allow God to shape our hearts and their desires.

Abba Poeman, a fourth century desert father offers a helpful way to think about how our desires and passions are shaped by God: "The nature of water is soft, that of the stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone. So it is with the word of God; it is soft and our heart is hard, but those who hear the word of God often, open their heart to the love of God" (Homiletics, p.57).

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