

October 25, 2020

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Reading: Matthew 10.37-42

The Message: You have a Superpower!

[Video](#)

Some nameless person in a crowd says plaintively to Jesus, 'tell my brother here to divide the family inheritance with me.'

Jesus could have answered, 'well, that sounds fair, bro, share what you've got!' or he could have answered, 'stick to the rules! The oldest gets the lot.' But instead he answers, 'it's not my calling to be judge over you!'

And then he tells a story that doesn't address the presenting issue, but rather gives the listener what they need in order to choose a path in life that makes the question irrelevant. This is a pattern repeated over and over again. People demand something from him, Jesus sidesteps the question and tells a story that dives deep into the morass of human greed for wealth or power.

And it isn't about dividing inheritances, it isn't even about what is just or fair. It's about the object of worship. Are we humans going to worship material possessions or God? That's the age old question.

From Jesus' teaching that we should be bringing our richness to God, through the efforts of medieval theologians, and 16th century reformers who sought to shape a just society to papal encyclicals of the 19th and 20th centuries to our own tradition of the Social Gospel movement that focussed us on doing good works, making faith relevant to the realities of the day has been a constant concern.

During an economic crisis, young business people in The Netherlands expressed an interest in the work of the reformer John Calvin. Why this interest in a country where the Christian faith has become almost invisible?

They felt an inability to make moral connections between their work and what might constitute a meaningful life -- which produced in them considerable anxiety.

Calvin provided an ethical compass in a world where young bankers felt anxious about the emergence of ever more sophisticated forms of credit and what increased debt was doing to the lives of their clients.

Now reformers like Calvin were instrumental in providing a foundation for capitalism. They saw work and commerce as part of the godly life. Calvin viewed economics as a way of connecting the life of the community with God's will. He involved himself in commerce:

As the leading author in Geneva, he developed the printing industry

He understood that lending was essential

And he approved charging interest -- but not to the poor

He saw work as a vocation -- useful in serving God and humanity. Profit was not for personal wealth, but to be reinvested in society to honour and serve God.

In the 19th century Calvin was rediscovered and this time his contribution encouraged Christians to see that the whole of creation was sacred -- including secular institutions, higher education, science, etc. Christians were called to participate in these institutions, embracing diversity while preserving the hope of creating a Christian society.

And now?

In a world where Christians no longer have a dominant voice, we need to recognize that, even in the midst of diversity, there are many who are committed to the good of society, and we are called to add our voices to theirs, participating, but not sacrificing our beliefs.

But we are anxious too. How do we prepare ourselves to act?

First we need a basis for confidence to dispel our anxiety:

We can look to Psalm 30 for the mercy and grace of God overpowering the sorrowful life with joy. This psalm is about the balance of life -- yes there is pain, but God provides a fresh start, favour, joy, gracious gifts of mercy and grace. "God, you heard my cry for help; raising me up from my distress, you healed me. I have been given a fresh start in life. You have transformed my life from mourning to joy, making my spirit dance and my heart sing your praise forever.

In case our foundation isn't firm enough to weather the desert of economic disaster, There are so many wilderness stories in the Bible. And the pattern is the same.

Psalm 107 describes God rescuing the people when they are lost in the desert and leading them by a straight path.

"God's steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks for God's gracious love."

God's unwavering love accompanies them, providing all they need.

Last week I attended a Bat Mitzvah, and in that service I heard a phrase that struck me in a new way. "Wherever we go is eternally Egypt."

We are always looking for the promised land -- and the stories of God's presence and God's power to sustain remind us that God will be in our time too.

And that is true even when we bring disaster upon ourselves. Despite the love, guidance, mercy, grace and joy that God provides, we so often get it wrong. In the book of Hosea we hear the reassuring message of God's deep compassion despite Israel's ingratitude. God will gather us up and return us home no matter what.

We need all this reassurance to hear the challenging parable Jesus tells in Luke's gospel. Jesus knows just what a mess of an economy we can create when we forget his teachings. With a simple parable, he reminds us that gathering stuff for ourselves is futile without a purpose beyond ourselves.

Jesus is saying that when we think only of ourselves, when we are interested only in ourselves and our own well-being, we can become 'deadened' to the needs of other people.

For us as Christians, we have a superpower! Because we give to our church, we gather our gifts together to serve God and the world. That's true of our money and our actions. If you have ever seen Mennonites raise barn walls or passers-by lift a vehicle off an injured victim, you know the power of combined actions. Our financial gifts do the same: when they are combined together, they become a superpower! Your gifts are needed so that we can keep on carrying out our Mission to the community. Through our two campuses, even now, we are serving 200 people a week and housing a family who were homeless.

Jesus' hands were kind hands, always doing good to others, giving and sharing, and he wants us to be like that also. When we live like that we'll find that we are not only 'rich' towards God, but our lives and the lives of those around us are enriched also.

Loving us means that Jesus wants life abundant for us, and worrying about how much we have is not life abundant. Life abundant is life with Christ. Calvin knew that. We can trust God. We can participate in the world, confident of God's transforming power.