

February 21 2016

Year C Second Sunday in Lent

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 27

Genesis 15:1-6

Luke 13:22-30

Sermon *Well, What About Them?*

Setting the scene again, the disciple asked Jesus one day, "Lord how many people are going to be saved?" Will there be many or will there be few? This time when I read the passage it struck me as a very, very misguided question. I think the fact is, the question misses the mark in a sad sort of way. Remember Jesus' profound words about the possibility that life which God has given each one of us is a gift. The one who put forth this question out of misguided curiosity is about numbers. In sort of paraphrasing, he said, "O yes Jesus you know and speaking about the Kingdom of God, give us a number at least in general terms of the number who is saved will be large or will it be small? Now anybody who has done any teaching before from a college professor all the way to a Sunday school teacher knows what it is like to be caught up in one of those profound significant points only to be side tracked by somebody fascinated by some point of trivia that has nothing to do with the subject. There isn't anything wrong about asking a whole lot of questions because that is how we learn and how we grow as people of faith teacher and student alike. Although I did learn as a parent of small children; I used to tell my boys that there is no such thing as a dumb question but I discovered that there is such a thing as a dumb question because it was asked quite often. Sometimes a question is asked in a diverse group, the subject at hand. I remember sometime at college for example the professor had a great lecture in preparation for a discussion but would have somebody in the class ask the classic question. "Doctor so and so how much does the mid-term count for our final grade?"

And that is why Jesus answered, I think in so marvelous way in this passage. A question that seems to overlook the bulk of the important matters that Jesus had been teaching all along. Jesus uses the opportunity to add four important lessons for us today about the Kingdom of God.

First Jesus suggested that it will be difficult to get into the Kingdom. And the particular metaphor that he uses is a door, the door is narrow. And that is the closest thing that Jesus is going to get to directly answer that question. That answer is the one that addresses the reality of going after anything that is important in life. As deeply as God loves us and as God loves the entire world faith has a price to pay as in any noble endeavor in this world. If you would be a scholar the long hard

days of study and research are going to be your calling. If you are going to be a star athlete, other activities may have to give way to make time for difficult disciplined training program. And to be a faithful follower of Jesus sometimes there is a cross for you and for me to bear. And that being said you need to recognize that what is also being said the gate is wide open. There is nobody blocking the way for those who would strive to enter the gate the way are perfectly clear. You simply have to understand that that is a gate to enter. So Jesus first answer is the gate is there and is narrow and it is wide open.

Second, Jesus replies that the time for preparation is short. To make this point Jesus tells this story about the householder who shuts the gate and refuses to allow anybody else to enter but somebody outside to cry to get in. The question of time is always is an interest to the church in the times of the gospels as much as it is now. And words such of these always fuel the fires of those who proclaim the imminent or the Second Coming of Jesus. But it is possible, it is possible to understand the urgency of any matter without making that urgency a measure on the calendar. Times and dates are not what is important here, instead it is important to wrestle with the opportunities that are passing us by every moment of every day of our lives. We are to be faithful in the light of God's grace and God's love for us and not just to avoid or be caught in them not just using our faith some kind of fire insurance for purchasing for hedging our bets. The essence of time is always running short So the message from Jesus is this morning is we should live each day of our lives as if it our last day and make the most of time we have.

A third lesson that Jesus to answer the question is that there will be no favoritism in the coming of the kingdom. In Jesus first two points, he has rattled us a bit but at this point if this doesn't make you a little bit uncomfortable, then buckle your seat belts just a little bit, the thrust here is if you claim to be a follower is not going to carry us in the Kingdom of God. I think that deep down inside in many of us we have a picture of ourselves somehow be included God elite royal guard. Maybe we don't activity seek a benefit from that claim but we believe that church membership ought to count for something, our faith ought to count for something, and it does and I not going to say it doesn't. What Jesus said time and time again there are religious people like you and like me, who must take on the greatest responsibility in this world around us? Jesus strongest words always seemed to be reserved for people who like you and me, the faithful ones who pretty steady church attendance give regularly to the church, the guys that set up the tables for the blood bank, serve on committees, and yet sometime to somehow miss the call to discipleship, tend to miss the good news of the gospel along with all those others sinners out in the world So lesson three is this. don't count on any favoritism where the Kingdom of God is concerned.

Fourth is an extension of the third. The judgment of the world around us are going to be reversed in the Kingdom of God. And the illustration of this lesson is that some of the last will going to be first and some of the first will be last are going to be last. This is a difficult pill for many of us to swallow, myself included we might not expect to be at the head of the table in the Kingdom of God, but at least I picture myself of being in front in a room when it all it takes place. The point is we have to rethink some of our expectations of what God's kingdom. And we will have view that with open minds and hearts far more generous look that some of those people who are considered to be less in this world than we are in the Kingdom of God.

There you have it a nutshell, a profound answer to a not profound question. Will there be many, the man asked Jesus and Jesus answered the gate is narrow but is open wide, the time is short so make the most of it, there won't be favoritism and sometimes earth's judgments will be reversed

The final thought this morning and that thought is difficult to pull from the written testimony from the scripture lesson. Sometimes in a verbal exchange it is impossible to capture what is going on in just the written word. In fact you can only guess as we try to reconstruct how this conversation really took place. The question is this, Lord will those poor souls to be saved. Very often when that kind of question is asked it is asked for the benefit of those other people out there but not for my benefit. The salvation for the asking the question issue, the questioner is asked how many of those other horrible people out there will be saved. As I said, you can't know this from the text, from the Jesus that rather cool response seems to indicate that the questioner that is more concerned about the salvation of all those others while he perhaps operated under the assumption that he was OK, and was in good stead. Jesus answered becomes all the more striking and the answer comes back more specific than general. Jesus uses the personal a lot, he said you described the narrow gate, you will stand and knock and cry and you will gnash your teeth and you will see others there. The question was what about all those other people and the answer that Jesus gave is not the answer expected; let's talk about you; let's talk about your faith; let's focus there first. Jesus said we should never forsake others, we should pray for others and do whatever we can to help others live lives of faith; but we are not to lose touch of ourselves either and be as concerned for your own sake as for others Look to the log in your own eyes before you look at the speck in eye of your brother or sister Pray that God will save all those others people out there but pray to God that each one of us because when all is said and done we all need that kind of faith. Together we say AMEN