

Sermon—Sunday, July 13, 2008
Ninth Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 10)
By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson: **Genesis 25: 19-34**
Psalm: **Psalm 119: 105-112**
Second Lesson: **Romans 8: 1-11**
Gospel Lesson: **Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Collect of the Day, Proper 10)

So, tell me—after hearing the Collect of the Day for a second time, how do we, as a faith community, understand what things we ought to do, and then find the grace and power to faithfully accomplish those things? What does that charge mean to us? Why do we pray to God to help us understand and accomplish such things?

It would be an understatement to say that God’s mind is not the same as our human mind. We simply don’t think the same way that God does, nor are we willing to act the way that God would like us to act. There seems to be some sort of disconnect between our desires, flexibilities, and observations and God’s desires, flexibilities, and observations.

Why is that?

We are creatures of habit. We are enemies of ourselves. We rely on the status quo to give us direction, to help us find our paths, to guide us along the way. What worked yesterday—or twenty years ago—will certainly work today. Yet, we forget, the world is in constant change—and change terrifies us. We can’t control change, and if we can’t control change, we can’t control our life, or the lives of others. We find ourselves on the outside looking in, unable to be a part of the bigger game that we desperately want to be a part of. Our sights are dimmed by our notion of ourselves and a God that we’ve created in order for us to meet our many needs and wants and whims.

We forget that we were built in God’s image, and that our task in life is to rejoice in, reflect on, and respond to the Divine nature that we find in our hearts and all around us. But first, we must listen closely to what God is telling—and asking—us.

At first, this seems impossible. How can we reason the mind of God? How can we rejoice in, reflect on, and respond to a God who seemingly is so far removed from us, who thinks in radically different ways than us, who insists that we break our status quo molds and enter the world in new ways? How is that possible?

Look around you this morning. When you came into this sanctuary today, you undoubtedly noticed pews that were roped off. How rude! When you came into the sanctuary today, you undoubtedly noticed signs that reminded you that stagnation equals death, and invited you to sit beside—or introduce yourself to—someone you didn't know. How presumptuous!

I hate to tell you this—I really do—but God is both rude and presumptuous. God asks fathers to kill their sons, asks elder brothers to give up their birthrights to their younger siblings for a bowl of stew, and asks us to get up off our butts, move to another pew, introduce ourselves to one another, and realize that stagnation does indeed equal death. Not physical death per se (although it might), but a death of the spirit—a death of the soul. The worst kind of death.

What happens when water—that life giving force that we are baptized in—sits too long and stagnates? It turns putrid and foul. It has no where to go and it turns in on itself. It raises a stink to high heaven.

What happens when we as human beings stagnate? Well, since we're composed almost entirely of water, the same thing happens—we turn putrid and foul. We find fault with ourselves and others. We find ourselves trapped by our own stagnant thinking, and we make a stink to high heaven. Nothing is going right. There's someone to blame and, by God, that person needs to know how we feel. We feel out of sorts. We want to hold secret meetings, keeping others out of the loop. We feel out of touch ourselves. We gossip. We tear others down. We ignore others, because they make us feel uncomfortable. We decide that the world is too big for us and that we have to live our lives by encompassing a parochial view of who we are and what we are. We feel like hell because we're entering *into* hell.

Yes—stagnation equals death. And it smells really, really bad.

As human beings, we love the status quo, which means we love stagnation—which ultimately means we love death.

Is that the kind of people that God calls us to be?

To follow God is simple—we simply must change our minds.

How simple is that?

I said it before—both last week and the week before—but it bears repeating: God demands from us a sacrifice of our control, a control that we never had in the first place. But God never asks us to give up something—even if we never had it in the first place—without replacing it with something far greater, and in this case God replaces our pathetic notions of control with perfect, God-given freedom. And from that freedom flows our ability to change not only our lives, but the lives of others as well.

Stagnant waters changed. New gullies, rivers, and lakes becoming living entities in dynamic ways. Seeds are sowed, not among thorns, but among fertile soil, which then is nourished by God's own life-giving moisture. And that life-giving moisture is *us*.

The world becomes fresh and alive. The miracle of resurrection becomes more than a stagnant theological notion. Human possibilities give way to incredible achievements.

But first, we must change our minds.

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Are we really ready to open our hearts and minds and allow God to fulfill this asking? Or are we simply willing to continue to stagnate ourselves, holding on to the stink that surrounds us?

As always, the choice is always ours. God would have it no other way. ...

Amen.

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