

Proper 27 Year C 2016

We have only two more weeks in the church liturgical year... that means just two more weeks after today reading from the gospel of Luke. Advent, as you know, begins the new church year. This year it begins on November the 27th... so we'll begin again with a new year and its seasons... We'll begin with the Gospel of Matthew for another year of discovery... another year of trying to make sense of ancient scripture in the context of our post-modern world... that is part of our practice, our work, right? To interpret through word and sacrament, and experience what God is saying to us... and more importantly discerning what God is doing in the world.... So that is the question that I want to pose today and every day for that matter, based on our reading from Luke's gospel this morning... The question is, what according to Luke is God up to?

Now we already have an idea, don't we... since the beginning of this gospel Luke has made the case for God's imminent (imminent, that is, breaking into present time, here and now) God's imminent kingdom being a world in which there is a revolutionary change in the social and economic order.... A disruption of the social-economic pyramid on which the powerful few lord their power and influence over the many who are powerless... It is a world in which wealth, power,

and social standing are redistributed forming a kingdom, as it were, of equals... a world in which love of neighbor is the guiding rubric. And God chooses to articulate this vision in the words of the poor, the sick, and the marginalized... the rejected... God chooses to speak in the words of the voiceless, the world's victims... that is to say that to know what God is doing in the world, one must seek out what God is doing among the disenfranchised among us... the victims among us but separated by a great gulf of privilege.

So again, we are confronted with the life of the widow... she who is representative of all victims of the repressive social order... We have seen her front and center throughout this gospel... she who is outcast, a mere pawn of the powerful... In ancient Jewish custom, a girl is given, given by her father in marriage, an arrangement among men... and if the husband dies and the woman is childless... she is to be given to her husband's brother, so that she may conceive and bear an heir... In our story today Jesus is challenging the absurdity of such a system... the poor woman in his parable is passed around among seven brothers until her own death... and then the absurd question asked by the elders, the elite, the powerful, the patriarchy... "Whose wife would she be in the resurrection of the dead?" And Jesus answers that in the New Age no one is married, because

their lives belong to God, which is a life of dignity and joy. And that the New Age is now, not in the hereafter, but now.

So think about this system... a woman is married in order to produce an heir, and if that doesn't happen she is passed off like property to another man for the same purpose.... Of course the possibility of death in childbirth was much greater in those days, so one could argue that women bore a probable death sentence because of multiple marriages... and of course women have no say in the matter.... For Luke this is a cardinal example of the social structure committing abuse.... This is an example of the patriarchy's abuse of women... To have to endure seven husbands would surely make one a victim... I suspect one husband is quite enough... This is what Sin is: the oppression of the weak by the powerful, plain and simple... Aren't we glad women aren't discriminated against in our own day!? So just to remind us: women couldn't vote in this country before 1920, less than a hundred years ago; women still make only 79% of a man's salary on average for doing the same job; women's deleting their e-mails seem to matter much more than men's... Pope Francis for whom I had high hopes, just this week declared that women will never become priests in the Roman Catholic Church... he has acquiesced to the patriarchy... acquiesced to the men's club.... So this passage of scripture today, though a hyperbole, is still relevant.... The gulf

between the powerful and the powerless still exists... and brothers and sisters, according to Luke, God will not stand for it.

This is not just a quaint little issue of making nice... This is a gospel issue... Good news of the emerging kingdom... and that good news is concerned solely with injustice, and inequality... So wherever there is injustice, and the abuse that injustice engenders... that's our business... that is what God calls us to change... We make the promise in our baptismal covenant... to bridge the gulf... to be about the restoration of justice and equality... to be about the restoration of the world as God imagines it... So to borrow from our bishop I want to say that I am proud of the Episcopal Church... in our own quirky way, we have stood, at great cost, we have stood for justice for women, for the poor... we stand for marriage equality... we stand for environmental reform recognizing that the ones most affected by climate change are the powerless, the voiceless, which are mostly women and children... We are beginning, in the church, to treat the concept of salvation as one that has to do, not with me, but our neighbor... And I'm proud of us at All Saints, as is our bishop, (for those of you at confirmation Tuesday night, you heard him say so) We are trying with limited resources to affect the lives of those less fortunate... we are trying I believe to live the gospels with integrity... and I

really believe that people in our community recognize that... So thank you for your work and commitment here... and we have miles to go before we sleep.

We confirmed in the church seven people this past Tuesday evening... two adults and five young persons... the bishop had us, clergy family and friends and sponsors... he had us gather at the chancel steps and lay hands on each confirmand as a symbol of their being a part of the succession of apostles who have kept the faith from generation to generation... they have chosen to be in solidarity with the gospel work of making their world fair and gracious and just and nonviolent... but what has stood out for me in this service was that During the laying on of hands I noticed the four girls who were confirmed holding each other's hands... a moment of sisterhood, a moment of solidarity... mighty girls being ordained as equals in a church of equals.... They will not be victims in a world that still scapegoats the presumed weak among us.... They will be mighty revolutionaries bearing God's radical love for their world.

Friends that is what God is up to in this world... always has been... raising up the so-called lesser of us into the light of dignity...And God will not rest until all manner of person is empowered to live into their true and full humanity... What is

God up to? God is up to changing the world, to make it just and right.... What an awesome privilege. What a joy to be a part of that.