

18th Sunday after Pentecost - Youth Sunday - September 18, 2016

Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera

Readings: Amos 8:4-7, Psalm 113, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 16:1-13

There is a collection of scriptures within the New Testament that are called pastoral epistles and they have that special designation because the Apostle Paul or one of his fellow church planters wrote them to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon and they are designated pastoral because they were sent to individuals who took charge for the congregations planted by Paul and because they discuss issues pertaining to Christian living, doctrine and leadership. Today's epistle reading, the first letter to Timothy, is characterized by its focus on church life. The letter specifically encourages prayer for all people so that there might be peace and with godliness and dignity. The author of the letter encouraged three specific types of prayers which, by the way, are the same types of prayer that we do when we gather on Sunday's during the prayers of the people: prayers of supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving. It is implied in the epistle that knowledge of God gives all followers knowledge of truth in God and there could be no better message proclaimed today for, as you have seen, our children and youth are taking responsibility for most aspects of liturgy on this first Children and Youth Sunday. This is one way for them to learn about the truth that lies within God, as the letter to Timothy states, because they are worshiping God and they are leading the rest of us into prayerful actions. I am proud of you, and I thank you those who helped them!

Discovering God through our actions was introduced in the pastoral epistle to Timothy and it was taken a step further in the Gospel from Luke. Through the parable Jesus his disciples a lesson on right and wrong actions. He taught them this because, like Timothy in the pastoral letter, they would be the ones planting new churches in the name of Jesus around the world, and so Jesus had to prepare them to be wise and observant leaders. And here we are today equipping people of all ages, including our children to discover the knowledge of truth in ourselves through the actions we do in our daily lives.

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus told this parable about a master or property owner and his manager or steward. The owner discovered that the trusted manager was not so trustworthy after all, he'd been committing fraud, a form of theft. So when the manager realized that he had been discovered by his boss he panicked and he decided to attempt to buy the trust of his boss's clients by "reducing their debt", probably to the amount that they actually owed the owner. In business management language, the manager's fraud would be described as "cooking the books" since he was pocketing the extra cash for himself. There are three moral teachings appended to the end of this gospel and they universal lessons for everyone to learn from. The first invites believers to choose righteousness and to trust that what appears to be the right thing to do from a human perspective might not be the right thing to do from God's perspective, for example he reduced the debt to the clients, but the goods or money weren't his to begin with so all he was doing was trying to save his reputation with the clients - as if they

wouldn't eventually find out the truth! This moral lesson was also Jesus' way to teach his disciples and the rest of us to pause, breath, and pray before making tough decisions; trusting that even when it might appear that a door shuts in front of us there is always a side window where the Holy Spirit is peering through waiting to lead us if we allow ourselves to be led! The second moral teaching was about faithfulness, and in that lesson Jesus teaches that a little faith and a lot of faith go hand in hand, as well as a little dishonesty and a lot of dishonesty go hand in hand. One's righteous and wrongful actions have consequences and they are always known to God no matter how little or how much right or wrong we may do. The third moral teaching summarizes the parable and ties it to Christian stewardship, not only of money, but of relationships; and not only human relationships but about our relationship to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the lesson is about our faith and trust in the most important aspects of life: faith and trust in God and in one another.

The lesson teaches us to value not the material things in life so much, but to value our relationship to God, and our relationship to those we love. The lessons invite us to reflect on what is truly important. I keep hearing in these lessons that relationships are the most important thing to value. Here today, by integrating our children and youth into the service we are honoring their godliness and their dignity. We are building relationships with them so that they can build better relationships with God and with one another.

After today's service the wardens and I invite you to give us a little more of your time so that we can share with you a sort of pastoral epistle or tool similar to a pastoral letter because it too addresses issues pertaining to our Christian living and leadership. The strategic plan will help keep us accountable to one another and to God as we align our mission and ministry with what God calls us to do for the sake of the kingdom of God, this parish family and the community around us. In the very same way that the apostles and Timothy learned how to plant churches we too are doing what we can to promote the values, the lessons, and the actions of Christ. As a congregation in growth mode we are using the tools at hand to build this corner of the kingdom of God that we call St. Gabriel's. I welcome you to continue to help build the kingdom of God! Amen.