

Sermon October 4th, 2020

God Offers Us New Life

When we hear a parable from Jesus, like the parable we listened to this morning, we see that sometimes Jesus' words are challenging for us to hear. For the religious leadership of the day they couldn't understand why Jesus, a carpenter's son, was speaking with such authority in their religious centers. So, they questioned Jesus. In response to their questions Jesus tells a parable that basically challenges the leadership to start listening to him or else suffer like the Israelites when they persecuted the prophets. I don't know about you, but I can start to understand why the leadership wanted to silence Jesus.

Jesus' words can be challenging for us to hear. For the leadership they feel threatened by Jesus' words and actions. Whether it is their authority that is being threatened or their job or their lives or even their salvation. They feel threatened and want to stop Jesus from further damaging their image.

The religious leadership of the day were not the only people who felt challenged by what Jesus had to say. For the disciples, we see throughout the gospels, that they feel inadequate. That what Jesus is asking of them is too much for them to do. They are not capable of performing such miracles or creating a community that is welcoming to all. We see them struggle throughout the early church with these expectations.

We can relate. Jesus' words can be challenging for us to hear. And not only these harsh parables that reflect God's judgment. But, also, Jesus' everyday teachings. For example, someone has hurt you really bad, and for some reason you can't let go of the anger you feel towards this person (**Image One**). What exacerbates the situation is that they are not apologetic for what they have done. Yet, Jesus still challenges us to forgive. Not necessarily reconcile. But, let go of that anger inside us, and wish them well.

Or, you say something hurtful to your spouse, and when they confront you, you get defensive. You justify what you said or say an awkward joke to try and brush it off. You know deep down inside you said something wrong, but your pride is getting the best of you. You will dig your feet in until the whole situation blows up into a big fight (**Image Two**). If only you would

have admitted you were wrong in saying what you said and genuinely apologized. You could have still made it to the lazy boy in time for the opening face off or the beginning of your favorite television program.

For those of you who are not married, you could easily plug in friend or parent or child or sibling in place of spouse in this example.

Or, someone new moves into your community. You want to show them hospitality, but you have heard a lot of stuff in the media (**Image Three**), and from those close to you, that has you question your safety around this person. Instead, of being hospitable when they wave from their driveway, you find ways to avoid them. Like dropping your keys or pretending to wave at your other neighbour that is just like you.

Or, you want to be generous to those in need, but feel overwhelmed by all the bills you have to pay that keep going up each year. You also need to save for this and that and the other thing. It doesn't help that you feel insecure in your job, and your finances, as you deal with this pandemic.

There are many examples we could probably think of where it can be challenging for us to hear what Jesus has to say to us.

What sometimes happens when we are unable to live up to Jesus' expectations for us, or we hear a parable about God's judgment like the one we hear this morning, is that we get down on ourselves. We feel unworthy, which often leads us down a further path of destruction. Or we start to push Jesus away, because we start to feel threatened by what Jesus has to say. Whether it is threatened in the old-fashioned eternal sense, or we feel like the comfort of our current life is being threatened, or we feel more vulnerable towards others if we follow through on what Jesus asks us to do. Either way, parables that we hear today, or falling short of what Jesus invites us to be, can become a stumbling block for us in our call to follow Jesus.

In response to our inability to hear Jesus, God changes the narrative. God decides that at the cross where our rejection of Jesus is front and center. That instead of showing wrath, God shows us grace. God forgives us. God takes our sin and turns it into an opportunity for us to experience new life. An opportunity to get up and try again. To be the people God created us to be. Good. Not perfect. Good.

This is the larger narrative we see taking place when we experience the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is frustrated with the leadership and sometimes with the disciples for not listening. Jesus even talks about judgment in response to our inability to listen. But, in the end, Jesus chooses to forgive us as he hangs from the cross (**Image 4**). Jesus chooses to reconcile with us. Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit to help us do good (**Image 5**). This is what makes this parable a little easier to swallow.

Yes, when we don't listen to God, we face consequences. The anger eats away at us when we are unable to forgive. Our relationships go through unnecessary stress when we can't genuinely say sorry. We live in fear instead of learning about our neighbour when we rely on misinformation. We live in constant anxiety of not having enough instead of trusting that God will provide. Freeing us to love others generously. We face consequences when we don't listen to Jesus.

But, our struggles to listen to Jesus no longer separate us from God. Our relationship with God is rock solid. God forgives us and then empowers us to do better. To listen to and follow Jesus. God turns our sin into an opportunity for new life. Giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us experience this new life. This is good news indeed!

Let us pray, gracious and loving God, lift us up when we fall. Make us new so that we can listen to your voice, and do your will. Even when it is challenging for us to hear, and to do. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**.

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