

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

November 9, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 78:1-7; Joshua 24:1-3a, 4-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

As you listened to the words from the Psalmist this morning, did something in the back of your mind make you feel a bit uneasy? What about the first lesson, from Joshua, when he challenged the Israelite leaders? Did anything seem uncomfortable? I ask that, because both lessons raise an important concept, an instruction, which caused me to wonder if we practice it as often or as effectively as we might.

Last week we spoke about All Saints' Day, the day on the church calendar when we pause and reflect on the lives of those who have gone before us, those who comprise the foundation of our faith. During the Eucharist we said the prayer that is especially intended for use on All Saints' Day. We prayed:

"For in the multitude of your saints you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses, that we might rejoice in their fellowship, and run with endurance the race that is set before us; and, together with them, receive the crown of glory that never fades away." And in the reading for All Saints' Day from Ecclesiasticus, we read about the different types of saints that have gone before us. We read:

"...let us praise illustrious men, our ancestors in their successive generations...Some wielded authority as kings...others were intelligent advisers...others directed the people by their advise...others composed musical melodies...others were rich and powerful...all these were honoured by their contemporaries...While others have left no memory, and disappeared as though they had not existed..."

Think about how those who have gone before us have been described. They were described as ranging from the "illustrious" to those who "have left no memory". And yet they have *"surrounded us as a great cloud of witnesses, that we might rejoice in their fellowship, and run with endurance the race that is set before us..."*

Those who have gone before us have played important, and yet perhaps unknown, roles in our lives of faith. And it is important that we take time to remember them. But as our Psalmist reminded us, there is something else we need to keep in mind, something that is very important, something that invites us to go even further. We heard the Psalmist say:

"That which we have heard and known, and what our forefathers have told us, we will not hide from their children. We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done...That the generations to come might know, and the children yet unborn; That they in their turn might tell it to their children; So that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the

deeds of God, but keep his commandments.” “So that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments.”

Think about the Psalmist’s words for a moment. Are we doing what he suggests? Are we able to do what he suggests? But before you answer that, let’s also think about what we just heard in the reading from Joshua.

After Joshua had gathered the leaders of Israel together, he challenged these leaders with the words: “...choose this day whom you will serve...” Joshua challenged them to look very hard at their lives, and to decide how they were going to live them. What was going to be important to them, where would their focus be, what would take first place in their lives? Listen to what the Israelites replied to Joshua, and very importantly, think about why they were able to give this reply. They said:

“Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

The Israelites knew their history, and after reciting all of the things that God had done for them, over a very long time, they were able to say: “Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.” The Israelites were able to clearly state why they would follow their Lord.

Can we do that? If someone asked us a question like the one that Joshua asked the leaders of the Israelites, could we give an answer that was as thorough as they gave? If we think about the saints that have gone before us, and if we really think about the words of instruction that we just heard from the Psalmist, and if we remember the response that the leaders of Israel were able to give to Joshua’s challenge, do you think that perhaps, something might be expected of us? In his book, “*Joys of the Lord*”, the author wrote:

“How about the witnesses God has produced concerning Jesus? Where should we start? We could talk of the times the Deity spoke to those around Jesus. We could talk about the transfiguration of Jesus. We could talk about the power of Jesus over storms. We could talk about the power of Jesus to raise people from the dead. We could talk about Jesus’ own resurrection. But that was yesterday, what about today?”

“...Yes, God has borne a mighty witness concerning the power and Message of Jesus in our world. But there is another witness to the power and divinity of Jesus—the power to transform lives, beginning with me.

When all is said and done, when the accounts of others, the experiences of others, today, and in history, are in, there is one more witness that matters—each of us. Every human

being who has ever lived, or ever will live, has a living witness within themselves as to the validity of Jesus and His Message.”

“...Every follower of Jesus has special gifts, all designed, not for personal glory, but for the building up of the followers...too many people think they don't have many, if any, gifts. They want to go quietly and humbly about their daily lives doing their thing. Our 'thing' is love. As we share our love, in whatever capacity, we share life, eternal life. So what do we do? We allow the Holy Spirit to show us where our love is needed. It's that simple”.

So let me ask you a question. This week, as we seek to be “Instruments of Peace”, as we seek to be the Christians that we are called to be, if someone asked us, why we are Christians, why we go to church, why our faith is so important to us, what would our answers be? Would we be able to give them an answer that would make sense to them and really convey all that is in our hearts?

If someone should ask us those questions, could we say, as the Psalmist said: *“That which we have heard and known, and what our forefathers have told us, we will not hide from their children. We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done...”*

And why would we want to be able to do that? Why would it be important that we can? Well, two very important reasons come quickly to mind.

First, when things are not going as we wish they would, or when life seems to be crumbling all around us, it is very valuable to be able to recall all of the good things that we have experienced, all of those times when you knew God's hand was in your life.

And the second important reason is so:

“That the generations to come might know, and the children yet unborn; That they in their turn might tell it to their children; So that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments.” “So that they, our children and their children, might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments.”

This week, let's each spend some time recalling. Recalling not just those things that we have learned in church or Bible study, but recalling our own life story, and the events of our lives. Let's spend some time recalling the events of our lives that have been so important to us. Events that have meant so much to us...and just might be very important for someone else, someone that we love, to hear.

AMEN