Region 9 Sermon Series - June 19, 2022

Commemoration of Emanuel 9

I Kings 19:1- 15; 2 Corinthians 5:11-20; Mark 4: 1-20

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Welcome to worship.

I am Pastor Ginny Aebischer and I serve as Bishop of the SC Synod. I greet you from our sisters and brothers in the South Carolina Synod and across Region 9. I am glad to be here leading you in worship today.

Our gospel text is from Mark 4, the parable about the fruitfulness of God’s Word.

It is the text that was being studied at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015.

We remember the Emanuel 9 whose tragic deaths on that night testify to us that there is still much work to be done in our world and in our churches so that we can live into Christ’s calling to reconciliation.

As we record this service we are once again overwhelmed and frustrated by violence in our communities, and we grieve with the people of Buffalo, New York, Newberry, South Carolina and Ulvade, Texas.

The parable of the Sower and its explanation point us to the power of God’s Word and to the hope of God’s promises even when we do not yet see their fulfillment.

Let’s take a moment of silence to remember and to center our hearts for worship.



ELW # 512

Lord, let my heart be good soil,

Open to the seed of your word.

…where love can grow and peace is understood.

When my heart is hard, break the stone away.

When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.

When my heart is lost, lead me on the Way.

Lord, let my heart be good soil.

O Lord, may the words of my mouth, and

The meditations in our hearts

Be acceptable to you, our Strength and our Redeemer. AMEN.

+ + +

The parable of the Sower seems rather straightforward

Especially because we are privileged to listen over the shoulders

of Jesus’ 1st disciples, and we get to hear our Lord’s explanations

But parables constantly call us back to re-examine their images

again and again, and to consider their meaning for our life in faith.

Jesus LOVES to teach in parables –

Images that are thrown alongside one another.

Images that sound like puzzles or insider stories that only

those “in the know” could begin to grasp.

Dr. Karoline Lewis said, “Jesus tells parables not for explanation,

but for exploration.

Not for answers, but to engage the imagination.”

Parables intend to make us think and to stretch our thinking.

What seems important in understanding the parables is

Listening for what Jesus has to say, and

NOT what we want to Hear or

what we think we already know and understand!

In the first chapters of Mark’s gospel we find Jesus proclaiming

with Authority that the Kingdom of God has come near.

He is associating with the ungodly, healing the sick,

casting out demons and breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus reveals himself and hides himself.

He is at odds with authority and religious types, and

Jesus doesn’t fit into any mold of MESSIAH

that anyone had Imagined.

Jesus is NOT what people were expecting!

When he launches into the parable of the farmer and the seed

The Disciples are confused, even though it is a very common image.

And they wonder aloud, “What in the world are you talking about, Lord?”

And Jesus answers, “I’m talking about the Kingdom of God, of course!”

My Mother was a child of the Depression, and a common refrain

in my home growing up was, “Waste NOT, Want NOT!”

My Mother saved everything from rubber bands,

to sheets of tissue paper, to morsels of leftover food.

I was told I needed to be part of the “Clean Plate Club,” because

there were children starving everywhere!

“Waste Not, Want Not!” You get the picture!

And then here comes Jesus teaching on the Kingdom of God

and he tells the story of a Farmer who goes out to sow seed.

This Farmer scatters the seed EVERYWHERE…

On rocky ground,

Among thorns and weeds

And in the Good Soil!

This farmer is indiscriminate, optimistic and EXTRAVAGANT!

I can just imagine the seed flying everywhere, and this farmer

joyfully casting it without worry, nor dependence on

where it will land.

Instead the farmer is simply casting the seed high;

sharing the power-packed kernel of new life as broad and wide

as possible!

The Kingdom of God that breaks in through Jesus is mystery.

As we dig deeper and look more closely we begin to see

that it is a gift for each and every one of us.

An EXTRAVAGANT and UNEXPECTED Gift of LOVE

that has none of the boundaries of human creation.

The Kingdom of God comes as a gift and has little or nothing

to do with our actions.

God sows the WORD;

The WORD, Jesus… lives, dies and is resurrected

to bring New Life to EVERYONE!

The Good News is that there is no category or division we can create that can separate us from God’s gift of love and life.

Jesus comes with God’s abundant, self-giving, extravagant love

telling us about ourselves, our world and our God!

The response has been rejection,

abandonment,

nailing him to the Cross and draining his life blood.

The response has also been

attempt after attempt to create boxes and separations

among ourselves to describe who deserves God’s love.

Yet, Jesus, our Lord, is still reaching out from the Cross

forgiving and giving us New Life;

making us into a New Creation.

When God raised Jesus he came back to us again

Promising never to leave us;

promising to love us –

each and every one of us!

Bishop Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

Has spoken often, and even written books about God’s love.

He says, “Our commitment to be an inclusive church

is not based on social theory

or the ways of culture,

but on our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus

on the cross are our sign

of the very love of God reaching out to us all.”

On the evening of June 17, 2015 a white supremacist

walked into Mother Emanuel AME Church,

sat down and joined the Bible Study

on the Parable of the Sower.

We all now know that his intention was to start a race war

by taking the lives of Black Christians

with whom he had been gathered.

Innocent lives were taken in an act of hate, that’s all too familiar to us now.

They were killed in a Temple of the Lord where love was shared

and life in Christ was embraced.

The Emanuel 9 are Saints who still witness to us today

from their graves …

of the power of God’s Word and God’s love!

Their family members stood up just days

following this horrific tragedy

to voice forgiveness in Christ’s name and to share

an understanding of the power of God’s Word

that despite anything that tries to stifle or kill it –

God’ Word will continue to prevail;

God’s Word will be spread broad and wide.

And God’s Word is Jesus!

God’s Word is LOVE,

And God’s Word is for EVERYONE!

Only God’s Word in Christ has the power

to stretch and transform us,

to equip us and entrust us

with a message and a ministry of Reconciliation.

Only God’s Word can open our hearts to the truth

That Jesus came not only for me and you,

But for all God’s beloved Children.

Only God’s Word, Jesus, can bring us Hope

for our communities and world.

In Jesus, we have the power to explore and imagine what it is to

become communities that reach beyond ourselves,

and begin to bring true healing and the transformation of God’s

extravagant love to every sister and brother.

Thanks be to God for this Word of Life and Love.

Lord, let our hearts be good soil! In Jesus’ name. AMEN.

+ + +