

Carol's reflection – November 15 2020

Do you know that Gospel means 'Good News'?

So, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of Mark, and the Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John are all the Good News about Jesus as told by... Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And, the message of Jesus is that God's love and grace is for everyone. Absolutely everyone.

And so when we come to a parable like the one today, one called the parable of the talents -- about a tough task master who entrusts property while he goes away -- and -- well -- you just read what happened -- it is a challenge to think of that as Good News for everyone.

It was years ago at a preaching conference that I heard Anna Carter Florence re-frame the story into Good News that resonated with me. Here's what she said:

"A man -- let's call him Jesus -- was going on a journey. He called his slaves -- let's call them disciples -- to him, and entrusted the gospel to them. To one, he gave stories; to another, he gave compassion; to a third, he gave the bread of life and the cup of salvation. There were other disciples who got other things, but we'll concentrate on these three. Then Jesus went away.

The disciple who got the stories went out and told them, and soon there were five other disciples telling those stories. The disciple who received compassion went out and offered compassion to someone else, and that person became a disciple, too, and she went on to give that compassion to others as well. But the disciple who had been given the bread of life and the cup of salvation dug a hole in the ground and buried them.

After a long time Jesus came back and he asked his disciple to come and tell him what they had done with what he had given to them. The first two disciples told him about the stories and the compassion, and they introduced the new disciples, and those disciples introduced still other disciples that they had made. Jesus was very pleased. "Well done, good and trustworthy disciples," he said to them. "You have been trustworthy in a few things, and now I will trust you with many things. Enter into my joy!"

Then it was the third disciple's turn. The third disciple told Jesus, "Master, I knew you were a harsh man. I knew you reaped where you didn't sow and gathered where you didn't scatter seed. I was afraid -- of messing up, of not getting the theology right, of what you'd do to me if I did -- so I went and hid the bread of life and the cup of salvation in the ground. Here, you can have it back."

But Jesus replied, “You wicked and lazy disciple! You knew, did you, that ‘I reap where I do not sow and gather where I do not scatter’? Well, if you were sure of that, you at least should have taken the bread of life and the cup of salvation to the church and let them figure out what to do with it! Then when I came back, at least we would have some broken bread and those baskets full of leftovers!” Jesus continued, “Take the bread and the cup away from this disciple and give it to one of the others. For all those who have the good news, even more will be given to them. But from those who have nothing – because they have buried my gospel in the ground – even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless disciple, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!

Then, bring him back to church next Sunday and we’ll start again.”

This addition is certainly in the tradition of Good News. It’s in Jesus’ nature to eat with the ‘sinners’, to welcome the outcast, to live beyond the boundaries and claim each and every one as brother or sister – beloved child of God. And, this re-telling, re-imagining gives hope to even the third disciple in the story – the one who was overcome with fear.

Certainly there are lots of interpretations of this parable. Don’t hide your own talents. Give your time wisely. Invest your money wisely. There are lots of ways to hear each parable.

For this one, if we hear it as a reflection on abundance, and how abundance and generosity can be crippled by fear, and how, even when we have been overcome by fear, we are invited back and loved as a precious child of God, then we can hear Good News. And, the Good News is not just for the first two who earn praise the first time around, but for the third, who is given the opportunity to live beyond fear, and to try again.

And we all know that we need some Good News to break into our world of fear today. We need to find a way to live ‘in the midst of’. We need to embrace love and care for each other ‘in the midst of a pandemic’; ‘in the midst of Code Red’; in the midst of our aloneness, and loneliness; in the midst of our worry and fear, in the midst of our disconnection and closed buildings and businesses. We need to live differently but bravely. We need to live in the confidence of God’s grace. We need to share hope with one another.

That’s why we will have communion this Sunday. Communion is about hope. It is about remembering who we are and whose we are. Granted, it will be on ZOOM, granted it will be people in their own homes, with essentially uncommon ‘common elements’. But we will eat and drink together at 10:00.

And we will hear words that claim our hearts, Jesus Christ, the bread of life, and the cup of joy, broken for us, poured out for us, and when we have fallen short, and been owned by fear, still, and always, we are welcomed back. We are welcomed back to have courage. We are welcomed back to try again. We are welcomed back to share the abundance.

And that's the Good News - the Gospel – this day and always.