

“Like A Bridge Over Troubled Water”
Sermon Delivered 8-08-2010
Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church
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Luke 12:32-40

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

The Bridge

When I took Homiletics in Seminary the professor would often quote Karl Barth saying one is to preach with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other while standing on the bridge between the two. The Bible as the Word of God and the newspaper as the word of the world is a difficult bridge to stand. If we were to just address the Gospel of Luke this morning without the newspaper we would be isolating ourselves from any application of God's Word to our lives and situation. So, this morning I am holding our Gospel Lesson in one hand and an article written by Peggy Noonan and David Brooks in the other hand. This can be like a “Bridge Over Troubled Waters...”

The Bridge Between Hopelessness and Hope

Peggy Noon wrote an article last Friday: “America is at risk of boiling over.” She used the same title in 1994 in referring to the calm before the storm. She states one of the biggest political changes in her lifetime is that parents no longer believe their children will have it better than they had it. She concludes her column with the words: “Inner pessimism and powerlessness is a dangerous combination.”

With the Bible in the other hand, we hear the words of Jesus according to Luke saying, “Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” What do this mean, “do not be afraid”? Many of us are secure with enough food, have a roof over our heads, and closets that are overflowing with clothes, but we are insecure about the threats of unemployment, recession, and all the other headlines that get our attention in the newspapers. So, the bridge many of us stand over in our lives feels like it spans troubled waters. What is in the Word for us this morning? What will happen in the lives of our children who we always thought would have a far more abundant life than we ever dreamed of for ourselves. What is the Word and how can we apply it to our lives?

Sounds Good....But

In the first century, when Luke composed his Gospel, wealth was considered to be limited. If someone gained, then someone else lost. They didn't believe, as we are coming to believe, that everyone could become wealthy. So, in order for the poor to get out of poverty, the wealthy would have to become poorer. (Malina and Rohrbaugh) Luke would be pleased to read that recently, 40 of the wealthiest families pledged half of their income to charity. You may not be in the top 40, but you are wealthy by global standards, even if you don't feel wealthy. In the first century, some held the view that if one was wealthy, one was blessed, and if one was less fortunate, one was cursed. Many seem to hold this view today.

Luke, in story after story, addresses Jesus and money from the rich man who had a terrific year and wanted to build another barn to store it so he could eat, drink, and be merry. What he didn't know was he was going to die that night. Another wealthy man approached Jesus about being saved, and Jesus told him to "give your money away and follow me." He couldn't, and walked away sad. There was once a rich man who wore purple and a poor man, a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man died and you know the rest of the story.

Okay, we got it. It is easy for someone to stand up and pontificate about wealth and stuff, but difficult to change. Even if we thought about change, would it be realistic in the 21st century? This is like a bridge over troubled waters holding the bible in one hand and the newspaper in another. We want our financial security, and we want the presence of God. We want it all and we want to do it our way and for God to bless our way of doing it. Some of us may feel we have it all and something is missing. You know people who have it all and some of them are joyful and some of them are sad. What is it? What makes the difference?

A Word of Hope

According to Luke. Jesus addresses the issue by saying, "where your treasure is, your heart is also". (v:34). Please note, he doesn't say, "where your heart is, your treasure will be." It is also important for you to know when Jesus spoke of the heart, it is what we know of as the mind. If you want to know where your heart is, at look at what you treasure and value - what you think about all the time. How do you do this? Reflect back over the previous week, month, and year of your life. Where has the bulk of your time gone? This is difficult. We may on one hand want to be good providers for our families and on the other hand want to have time with our families, and conflicts can emerge. If you were to do review how you spent money over the last week, month, and year it would reveal what you value. If we take our bank reports and our day timers we can truly see where our treasures and hearts live. As Dr. Phil would say, "How is this working for you?" I hear some people saying, "My heart just isn't in it." If you catch yourself echoing such a thought, consider it a blessing, a time to evaluate what you treasure. What is the vision for your life?

Jesus says, it is the “Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” The ground of your being (Tillich) is the presence of God in your life. God ceases to be just “the man upstairs”, above the clouds, and keeping records of right and wrong, rewarding and punishing accordingly. The Kingdom Jesus says the Father is pleased to give you is a treasure. This is not a treasure you seek, but is present in your life. As Jesus said, blessed are you who have ears to hear and eyes to see it. Peggy may be right. The world as we have known and experienced it will be different for our children.

Summoned Life

I like Peggy, but this week I sided with David Brooks from the *New York Times*. He wrote an article called the “Summoned Life”. Standing on the bridge, David seems to address what we can do in the world. David contrasts the *Well Planned Life* from Clayton Christensen commencement address at Harvard. As a Rhodes scholar, he would take one hour a day and meditate on why God put him on this planet, then plan his life and put it into practice. This is the American Way for many. We plan our lives, and ask God to bless these plans.

Brooks lifts up an alternative to the *Well Planned Life* as a “Summoned Life.” A life where we ask, “What are the circumstances of my life asking me to do?” How is the Spirit of God directing my life? Instead of me asking God to bless my plans and treasures what are the plans and the treasures God is giving me in my life to bless? Perhaps there is a balance between Noonan and Brooks with the Word of the Lord.

Standing on a bridge over the troubled waters of our lives, perhaps we can bring our plans for our lives with a knowledge and awareness that the circumstances of life don’t always comply with our plan. With a spirit of openness to the circumstances in our lives, and the Power of God, the very ground of our being is where the Kingdom is, and where the treasure and our hearts are found.