

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Third Sunday after Pentecost: June 13, 2021

“Clueless”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning everyone and don't forget, Bishop Marc will be with us next Sunday, so please if anyone wants to share their computer screen with someone who is not able to connect to us, that would be great.

So, I guess this will not be a secret to you, but have you noticed, I mean really noticed that not one time does scripture imply “wow human race, you really know how God has this planned, good job.” Instead we get the idea that basically, when it comes to God's ultimate plan for our lives, we are clueless. In Jesus' parable the farmer sows some seeds and then harvests the grain without really knowing how that all happens. And let's admit, even with scientific studies, how and why things grow and all that implies is nothing less than a miracle if not a mystery.

Jesus also shows us that our tendency to judge things by their size is also incorrect as even the smallest seed can produce and grow into a tree, showing once again we are clueless as to how and what God is doing.

If we look at our Old Testament reading, the anointing of David, the ancestor that would be traced into the bloodline of Jesus. Again, what is clear here is that our human expectations of the eldest, the more robust, and all those other things that we humans tend to value, are not necessarily the criteria God uses to work in the world.

David, the youngest son, the one that is not even present at the beginning of the sacrificial gathering, is the one God chooses. But this is not the first time when God uses the younger, the smaller, the more innocent, to be the model of God's choosing. Is this preparation for a babe in a manger becoming our savior as the normal trend for God's redeeming grace? This again, seems to reinforce that we humans have no idea where God is leading us; we are clueless.

But what does become clear to us today is that God does not judge as humans do and, in fact, the outside appearance, the financial stature, or even the smallest seed that people would disregard, have a different meaning to God.

God seems to care more about where your heart is, than who you are or what you look like or even if society feels you are important or not. Last week when discussing the unforgivable sin, we learned that the most egregious sin to God is a hardening of the heart.

Today God confirms that your inner-most self is what is important. For most of us, this is really the good news. This is the news that brings solace to the poor and sets the captive free. We are all naked in the eyes of God. He looks at our hearts, our motivation, not our social status. We may never achieve our earthly goals, we may never have an amazing bank account, we may never have the physical ability that we would like to have, and God reminds us, this is not the important thing. What is important is our hearts.

However we live our lives, whoever we become, whether servant or king, it is the compassionate heart, the one that seeks God, the one that sees God working in their lives even through the tough times, this is what is important.

We are called today to examine our own hearts. Have we become hardened or bitter? Are we being blindsided by the conventions and judgements of the world that continually tell us we are not enough? Are we able to see others in their own struggles and find compassion? These are the qualities God wants us to develop.

I visited an elderly woman whose husband is in the last stages of Alzheimer's Disease. She looked me square in the eye and asked the usual questions I hear, "why is God doing this to me, why is He punishing me?"

Of course when I asked her why she felt that way, she responded with the usual list of having to provide caregiving while still having to go to her part time work for some extra money; and now her husband often didn't recognize her; she was tired; she was sad; and the list continued. I wondered, was her heart beginning to harden? Was it closing to what God was really doing?

When she was done, I told her she had a lot on her plate. I told her I was sorry she felt God had put her in this situation to punish her. But then I asked her what she was gaining from the experience. For a while she couldn't find an answer, then she said, "But I love my husband." After a few moments of silence, I mentioned to her that maybe God was giving her an opportunity to grow her spirit, her compassion, and her soul. Maybe in God's eyes the money, the hardship, the suffering was all so temporary that for God it would all be alright because her heart had loved greatly through this opportunity.

Well, then she started to cry. She said she had never looked at things from that perspective. She had no idea what God had planned for her; she was clueless. She wondered if she should have gratitude instead of anger; wonder rather than despair. After all, the love she had, even after the death of her husband, would still live on in her memory. Her heart was expanding, her compassion stretching, and her view of what was

really important was beginning to change. Still not an easy life, but a little lighter with a softer heart.

Suddenly the hardship was more endurable, the money less important, the way her husband's physical appearance had declined bothered her less; she was serving up love, through the strength given her by God. And there was a wonder of what God would send next into her life, not to punish her, but to bless her into more heart openings.

Of all the sons Jesse had, the youngest, the least expected, the one with wonder in his heart, would become the foundation of our own Christian heritage. As a whole, we will never see the picture of what God is planning. We are, and will continue to be, somewhat clueless. We will see cycles of good and bad, of stillness and of change. This gives us a chance to look at our own hearts when we make decisions. We can give grace to others who may seem alright on the outside, but are hurting on the inside. We can not judge things on expectations or appearances alone, and when we find ourselves in the hard places, look for those things that will grow us in the spirit. It is never easy, but it is doable if we relax and allow God's work to unfold.

When I think of young King David, of the mustard seed, or my families facing struggles, I see opportunities for the heart and soul to grow. I see, from small beginnings, God working in the world. It is my hope that as we move forward through both the good and bad times this year, an unfolding unprecedented year, we see the opportunities God gives us to grow our hearts, rather than feel only the burden. Like the song says "I have high hopes." Amen