

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 24, 2023

“The Struggle is Real to God”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. Today we have readings tie together rather well. We have God feeding the Israelites; the Epistle recognizing fruitful labor, which of course feeds us; and lastly the Gospel with the landowner and wages, again the feeding of ourselves and family. In case you feel this story doesn't apply today, or that it is only a metaphorical tale, I will give you the 2023 version and clarify that this Gospel story is very relevant today.

A wealthy man drives to the street close to the Home Depot where the migrant workers line the curb hoping to get work for the day. He chooses a few; they agree to the day's wage; and the men then go work at this man's home.

The man realizes that the work isn't getting done fast enough because he has an event coming up, so he returns to the street adjacent to the Home Depot and gets a few more laborers. He does this several times, until at the end of the day, the work is done. He then pays everyone the same amount.

Well, according to our Gospel story, this angers some of the workers and of course we know the reply. The wealthy man has the privilege to do as he

pleases with his money, which he does, and he has, of course, kept his original agreement.

But maybe that is not the end of the story. Let's go one step deeper. Maybe the young men out at the Home Depot early in the day were single, or lived nearby, or had transportation to their waiting spot. They were fit and ready to go - the perfect choice for work and the wealthy man knew they could do the job.

Is it possible the second set, maybe didn't have transportation, got lost on the way to the waiting spot, or had to get their kids off to school? They arrived a little later and maybe a little more worn and worried, and yet, ready to be chosen and work the rest of the day. For those left from the morning, they now are probably hungry and thirsty, and the day is wearing on, and so is the worry.

Is it possible that at the end of the day, the migrant workers chosen were those who arrived at the Home Depot street as part of the second job they need to survive? Maybe they had to make sure their kids were home from school. Possibly they couldn't get transportation, or maybe they just didn't feel well enough to work in the morning. But they came to the street to look for and were ready to work. Whether early or late all needed to eat and/or feed their families. Those who might still be waiting for work from the morning now feel like they are waiting in vain and their stress level is up. There is no perfect playing field.

For our wealthy man (the landowner in the Gospel), maybe his own personal journey makes him understand that “the struggle is real.” Everyone is on a journey, everyone has trauma in their life at some time, and everyone gets hungry. What if our landowner understood that every day people have needs whether they are visible or not, and therefore since he had the abundance to care for them, he did. No questions asked.

God is our wealthy man, our landowner, and God knows the struggle is real. This is why through Jesus our sins are forgiven no questions asked. There is not one wage for a big sin, or another for something small. Sin is just sin to God. But so is forgiveness. There is one Baptism. It should be a relief that God doesn't dole out our salvation according to our works.

The Israelites were not trusting in God, and even though they had witnessed mighty things, they chose, just as the laborers did, to feel they had to question and control what God should allow and not allow. Who and what God should care about and who he should chose. And when God comes through in the end, the Israelites don't know what to do.

But there is also a deeper level in that the manna from heaven had a limited shelf-life. The people needed to consume what was given them in a short period of time; they were not allowed to hoard. This meant trusting that God would show up to feed them on a daily basis, no questions asked.

This trusting in God for our daily bread has ancient roots and cannot be taken for granted. God understands the struggle, and in our scriptures today shows us that he is with us daily and will provide. But it is we who

have to expect good things, look for good things, and also not covet or be jealous of others as they receive what it is they need. For we don't know the backstory to people's lives and what affects someone in one way may differ from another. And even if we did know the true details of someone's struggle, we might not ever be able to understand it.

We are a few weeks away from our stewardship time, please take in consideration the abundance God has given you. But also take a moment to examine whether you are comparing yourself or your stance in life to someone or something else. In a society full of movie stars and pop culture heroes, I have never needed an actor to repair my car, or a politician to fix my plumbing. Remember everyone is in the struggle of life, and our judgment of their worth or what they deserve is not what counts. God always knows that backstory, and the present and future story as well. Thank God, he doesn't judge us on our merits.

Trust and be open to what manna and blessings God has in store for you, as you also become the manna and blessing for others. Remember that you too can do what you please with what you have, no questions asked.
Amen