

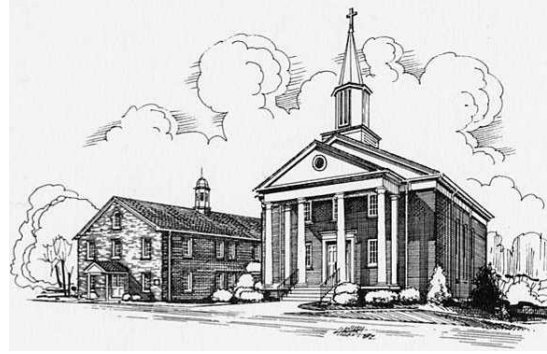
The Lessons Appointed for Use

on the

Proper 9

Year A

RCL



Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Psalm 145:8-15

Romans 7:15-25a

The Collect

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

The servant said to Laban, “I am Abraham’s servant. The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; but you shall go to my father’s house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.’

“I came today to the spring, and said, ‘O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,” and who will say to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also” —let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’

“Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down

to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes." Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the

field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, and said to the servant, “Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

The Response

Psalm 145:8-15

Exaltabo te, Deus

8 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, *
slow to anger and of great kindness.

9 The LORD is loving to everyone *
and his compassion is over all his works.

10 All your works praise you, O LORD, *
and your faithful servants bless you.

11 They make known the glory of your kingdom *
and speak of your power;

12 That the peoples may know of your power *
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; *
your dominion endures throughout all ages.

14 The LORD is faithful in all his words *
and merciful in all his deeds.

15 The LORD upholds all those who fall; *
he lifts up those who are bowed down.

Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON

If you were raised as I was, and I'm quite sure that you were, you were taken to church each Sunday from an age way to young to understand anything that was happening because it was understood to be "good" for you in the same way the cod liver oil my mother forced down my throat was thought to be "good" for me. Each was believed, with the unquestioning faith of the true believer, to confer some unspecified benefit divorced from any other concerns, including understanding. Church attendance was what good people did, and all parents want to raise good people, so that's what we did.

In the course of it all, we lost sight of what a radical teaching Jesus brought to the world. "Love anyway"? Unconditional love? Love for those who hate you? Really? But for the most understandable of reasons our parents turned a world-destroying revolutionary teaching into instruction on good manners, and we lost so much by that. Believe me when I say that the faith we truly embrace is radical. It is forever at odds with the "ways of the world", the accepted course of life the world insists is the only possibility. The war is inside each of us, even inside no less an authority than Paul, who confessed:

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

I called it “the ways of the world”. Paul calls it sin. The concept is the same. The teachings of our faith prescribe one way of living; the accepted course of humanity is at odds. The battle lines are set and cannot be avoided.

I substituted “the ways of the world” for Paul’s more accurate “sin” because sin has been so heavily loaded with baggage that it is scarcely recognizable. We all know what sin is, without being too specific. Sin is the awful things other people do and which we do in a much lesser and more forgivable form. We make sin much too specific and much too external and by that means lose sight of sin as an attitudinal failure in our approach to God’s creation. We see God’s creation as something to be used, not treasured. Not always, but often enough that we are led astray, fundamentally.

In these disturbing times of pandemic and political upheaval, I’ve seen several people mourning for the good old days when we had just 3 television channels and John Cameron Swayze told us what had happened but didn’t insist (or even suggest) that we had any

duty to become personally involved in it. One of the people who was being nostalgic about the good old days was a classmate of mine. I responded that many, many people of color would not agree with her estimate of the goodness of the old days. Another friend jumped to her defense, writing that he was certain that our friend was not wishing for a return to the race relations of the 50's and 60's but rather a return to the values we were all taught as children. I agree, but my point remains. We weren't taught to be deliberately vile in our childhoods. We were just not taught to engage with the pain of others, particularly of others with dark skin. I knew that as comfortable as my childhood was, there were others, not so far away from me, in Avondale, who would not come to adulthood with such comfortable memories. I was aware of awful conditions not far from my home, but it was never suggested that I should engage their suffering. By refusing to even acknowledge their pain and discomfort I was walling myself off from a part of God's creation. I wasn't told that. I was told I was being a good little boy by going to church without making a fuss.

The point I am trying to reach is that we KNOW we are to follow the radical, earth-shaking teachings of Jesus, but we too easily turn

to the easier path taught by well-meaning parents and the forces of our culture.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The price for the comfortable lives we enjoy is a willingness to overlook the inequities we do not wish to engage. Benign neglect, you might call it.

Of course, there's always charity, isn't there? I give money each month to St. Jude's or Shriner's Hospital. I can't remember which one because the bank sends the check automatically. Technology is wonderful! I'm helping sick children in poor families, and I don't have to lift a finger, or get involved in the unsavory bits of other people's lives! Yay, me!

Except...

“I came today to the spring, and said, ‘O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,” and who will say to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also” —let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’

The servant is praying for someone who involves herself with the needs of others, and she is provided.

“Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So I drank, and she also watered the camels.

What a testimony Rebekah brings us today! I started this talk by noting, “We make sin much too specific and much too external and by that means lose sight of sin as an attitudinal failure in our approach to God’s creation.” Rebekah involved herself in the needs of others. She gave the servant the water he requested but went further, seeing even to the need of his camels. She sprang to address that need not by turning a valve or some such magic of technology but by drawing water herself from the well by a rope! That is what I

mean when I speak of engaging the needs of others. Engagement must include involvement.

Our sin, the “ways of the world”, speaks of valuing individual initiative and self-dependence while, at the same time making it impossible for many to become independent. Why should a course of Remdesivir, the drug which shortens the hospital stay for very sick victims of Covid-19, cost \$3,120? What of people who don’t have \$3,120? What provisions are made for them? Why should it be that in the United States, in 2007, the top 20% of Americans owned 85% of the country's wealth and the bottom 80% of the population owned 15%?¹ The “ways of the world” value greed. Our faith teaches the value of loving as our Father loves, involving ourselves in the struggles of our brothers and sisters. In a country as wealthy as this, can we not find a way to water the camels of the poor?

AMEN

¹ Wikipedia, “Distribution of wealth”

BENEDICTION

I #RACKed the car behind me at McDonald's this week, paying for his breakfast. I hadn't done that in a long while, and it just struck me to do it. I pulled forward as he got his food, stuck my hand out my window and waved. He didn't wave back. I wonder if he was trying to evaluate whether, in a world which teaches greed and self-good, there was some string attached?

A few days later, I pulled to the payment window and was told that David and Linda Jones, a couple of cars ahead, had paid for my breakfast. My camels were watered.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.
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