

Sunday August 14, 2022
First Lesson: Hebrews 11:29-12:2
Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 49-56
Sermon Series: Growth Effect
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are continuing with our sermon series called “The Growth Effect.” This is a sermon series designed to examine the progress that we have made as a result of our many weeks spent together on both the Pruning Effect and Spiritual fruit Effect sermon series.

- So the immediate questions that comes to my mind; that were also questions raised from our Wednesday evening class *Applying the Sermon to Life*; that I think are worth exploring together are;
- How can we fully trust this growth process that we have been talking about for a number of weeks?
- For last week, the Hebrews letter encouraged the Israelites to look at their former ancestors for wisdom and faith;

- Furthermore, this week, as we look at our first lesson a little closer from the same book, this is some of the theme that the book of Hebrews is continuing with;
- For the idea was that if God has helped their ancestors from before, then God would certainly help them now.
- However, our Wednesday class pushed back on this rationale somewhat, to ask questions such as, “How can we trust our traditions from before to inform us?”
- How can we fully trust and rely on the stories from our ancestors from before?
- Furthermore, who are our ancestors?
- Who are these great cloud of witnesses?
- What is our right relationship with these cloud of witnesses?
- What is our right relationship with tradition?

- Finally if we are to get through all of these questions in roughly 22 minutes or so, because I know some of y'all are timing this message as we speak, not to mention I still have the gospel lesson to go through as well...!
- But after we wrestle through these questions that the Hebrew text of last week and this week presents, then the million dollar question becomes, what does all of this growth we have been talking about promise us?
- So looking at the Hebrew tradition and experience that the Israelite people were encouraged to rely on and use as their faith and growth model of their day; I invite us to notice that the Hebrews letter that is being continued, is not painting a very rosy picture of these traditions or the ancestors that lived in them.

- And so it is in this observation alone, that is what is actually catching my hermeneutical passion and attention this morning;
- For in life, think about it, we tend to like to romanticize and glorify our history....don't we.
- In life, as a people, we tend to like to gloss over the darker pieces of our history because well, **it's not a good look for us**, if we take in the whole picture, now is it?
- For it is my observation, that the human mind tends to blot out some of those darker moments of our history for a myriad of reasons and motivations.
- For **sometimes our past** can be triggering.
- **Sometimes our past** can be harrowing;
- **Sometimes our past** can highlight some things in our actions that we are not proud of.
- **Sometimes our past can** highlight some trauma that we have actively participated in,

- So typically what the human mind does, is hold onto the good memories, that brings forth this element of nostalgia, that can even be quite comforting, especially during a present time and reality that may not be as comforting;
- Holding onto the joys of yester-year could even become a nice distraction, that actually can prevent us from growing into who we are called to be for today;
- However, what I love about the writer of Hebrews, is that Paul is not presenting a glorified past to the people at all to make his point.
- For in their day, **it wasn't a good look**, as we look at the Hebrews text this morning as an example, **the fall of Jericho**; for although this event showed the total inability of temporal forces and factors to stand before the power of faith in God, I think it is important for us all to take in the whole story;

- For if we were take in the whole account of how the people were to inherit this Promise Land that was just beyond this wall, I think we may begin to see some of the challenges that this story may present.
- For the Walls of Jericho were massive stone walls surrounding an ancient Neolithic settlement in Jericho, built about 8000 bce.
- These walls, at least 13 feet (4 metres) in height, were intended **to protect the settlement and its water supply from human intruders.**
- So the key word we need to focus on is the word intruders, which should clue the readers in that a war would be ensuing soon enough;
- For the Israelite's challenge, **would be to take the land of Canaan**, the Promised Land.
- For I stopped by to say, there were no people waiting on the other side with home baked cookies to usher them on in;

- Therefore, their first obstacle was to conquer the city of Jericho ([Joshua 6:1](#)), which was known to be an unconquerable, walled city.
- Making the challenge for me as I engage this text and perhaps others will resonate with me as well on this, **is the issue with war in itself;**
- For it is extremely complex the issues that surround war when injustice is on the line; when inequity is on the line;
- Especially when the contrary side is not willing to negotiate on these matters; it is clear that there is a battle to be fought.
- However, I am still working through this thought that the way we as humanity choose to fight and perhaps God's idea of what it means to fight, **may be two entirely different things.**
- So this is one hermeneutical thought I am still working through and trying to process through; the

question of if there is a fight to be had, what does this fight look like?

- For I am having a difficult time believing that God would invite any of us into a process of bloodshed and war, in order to bring forth the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven ;
- I guess this is a long way of my naming that I see another sermon series or small group rising in our midst, that might allow us to look at these concepts of war a little bit further together....because although I do not have the answers... what I do know, is that **I want the war** in Ukraine to stop.
- **I want the war** in our neighborhoods to stop.
- **I want the war** between nations to stop;
- **I want all of the blood shed and violence to stop**...like yesterday;
- For **I will never** stop hoping for a better day;

- As long as I have breath in my lungs and a voice to share, **I will never stop** seeking a better way forward, that will allow us all to come together in productive, fruitful and reconciling discourse.
- And this is no disrespect to the people who have served our country in the name of war who have both passed on and is still alive;
- I want to say I appreciate your service to our country, I love your dedication that has made all of our freedoms possible...I just wish that things didn't have to be this way...for I'll reiterate **I will never** stop seeking a better way, for I truly believe in my heart that there is a better way together!
- Moving on in our text; **it isn't a good look**, how women were portrayed in this time either....something that Pastor Caity really wanted me to name and touch upon in this passage, and I agree with her wholeheartedly that it is appropriate for me to do so;

- For most of us may agree that seldom women were even named in the Bible nor their entire story even told.
- Furthermore, if their name were to be mentioned and their story were to be told, the focus was typically on their ability to bear children (mainly male children), as being their sole priority or purpose; to continue the family inheritance and reign of power;
- The other way we see women being presented in the Bible is that once again we get to hear another woman being called a prostitute, or I believe the term harlot would be the antiquated term of this day;
- Either way, I will say it again...**that this is not a good look**; but at least **this time** we have a name...and her name is Rahab.
- **This time**, as I find myself more and more identifying with Rahab, we have a woman who is

named, in the midst of a patriarchal society as being one that we can learn from and grow from, which is growth for the writers and orators of this day to even claim;

- That a woman who may have been a prostitute , could not be overlooked or denied, for God justified this supposed harlot....and that is all that really matters.
- And that is a true Word isn't it for us all to take in?
- **That it doesn't matter** if our critics doesn't think we should have a certain position;
- **It doesn't matter** if our haters do not find us worthy;
- **For Rahab** had a knowledge of the true God, as did her fellow townsmen.
- **Rahab exercised** obedient faith in God and was preserved.
- The others did not and perished.

- So **this time**, the growth effect can be seen in that a woman by the name of Rahab was not only named, but was seen and claimed by the One who would allow her to be a model for us all of what it means to be faithful.
- So how can we trust our traditions?
- How can we trust the stories of our ancestors?
- How can we trust the growth effect process?
- **For me it is the fact** that in our Hebrews text, these dark events are not being hidden,
- **For me it is the fact** that we get to witness the entire story; the good, the bad and the ugly;
- **Because it is in these** honest details;
- **It is in these** challenging accounts (verse 32 of our Hebrews text) of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets — **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, **34** quenched raging fire, escaped

the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight; that we get to see God's activity moving through the people;

- **For it is in these details** that if our temptation is to hide the darker details of our history that could make us look bad, **we miss out on those Red Sea parting moments that defines just how good our God really is!**
- **For we serve a God** of justice who can see past our world-given name and reputation;
- **We serve a God** of compassion who allows us pass through our Red Sea moments as if it were dry land!
- **We serve a God** of infinite wisdom who sees the world with a holistic vision and perspective;
- **We serve a God** whose love shows no bounds especially when it comes to God's children;

- And how our gospel this morning presents this truth is in a manner that could take years for humanity to wrap our heads around, **because this time**, Jesus is not painting a picture of peace;
- In fact this time Jesus is unapologetically stating (v 49) “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze!
- **This time**, Jesus is declaring (v53) ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!
- Biblical scholars that I researched, would agree that on the surface this passage seems to refer to strife and division (cf. v. 51); that perhaps relates back to the beginning of this chapter if Luke, where a situation was rising out of the opposition of the Pharisees to Christ.
- Therefore one possible interpretation regarding the meaning of **fire** here, Scholar A. B. Bruce says: “the fire of a new faith, or religion, a burning

enthusiasm in believers, creating fierce antagonism in unbelievers: deplorable but inevitable.”

- The second part of verse 49 might be translated: “How earnestly I wish that it were already kindled.” Creed says: “Christ wishes that the fire were already kindled, because it must needs be so before the kingdom of God can come.”
- A simpler way of processing what is going on in our text that I attribute to an idea that came from our *Wednesday Applying the Sermon to Life* class, that also wrestled with Christ proclaiming that he was intentionally bringing forth division is like that of a plant; where another aspect of plant propagation that I identified last week of being seed, sprout, small plant, adult plant; is where if you want a plant to grow in its finest form, you take cuttings from it that will **allow you to keep the special characteristics of that plant.**

- For plants grown from seed will often be different from the parent plant and from each other.
- Therefore propagating a new plant via cuttings avoids the difficulties of propagating by seed.
- For with cuttings you have a faster start of your cultivation because it's already a little plant.
- In comparison with seeds, **cuttings therefore have a shorter growth period, which generally allows you to harvest quicker.**
- In addition, you are sure that you have a female plant, which is important for the yield of your crop.
- To place this metaphor in our passage today that may speak to where we are today; the ultimate way that you and I can trust the stories from our traditions and ancestors is we take a look at the whole story and own that in this story, we are the metaphorical cuttings of this historical plant which is the Church;

- Which means that as a Church, **we continue on** with those characteristics that made us great as a people;
- **We continue on** and expound upon those traditions that made us the resilient people that we are as a Church community;
- **We live into** being the metaphorical cuttings of an ancestry that was built upon faith, hope, love and trust in the One who made us to be One;
- In the same token, **we recognize that** there are some aspects of the original Church, the parent Plant, that has not always been as loving;
- **We recognize that** as a Church we have not always seen those who are hungry;
- **We recognize that** as a Church we have not always seen those who are thirsty;
- **We recognize that** as a Church that our actions have not always lined up with Christ's mission to to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim that

captives will be released, so that the blind will see, and the oppressed will be set free;

- As a people who are the Church, **we recognize that** with each generation that comes and goes, this represents another cutting taken from the plant of the Church; that will allow us to get that much closer to actually being the Church that Christ would call us to be;
- **With each cutting**, we get that much closer of fulfilling what the Lord requires from us; to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God;
- This is in my mind what our right relationship with tradition and our ancestors looks like.
- And the promise that we get from going through this growth process is living into the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven;
- A kingdom that is like a mustard seed; which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and

became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches” (Luke 13:18-19).

- This is the growth effect in all of its potential and infinite possibilities;
- Which is another reason that I will continue to have faith and trust that the best is yet to come!