

Sunday, September 25, 2022  
First Lesson: 1 Timothy 6: 6-19  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 16: 19-31  
Sermon Series: Harvest Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- We are continuing with the sermon series, “The Harvest Effect;” a sermon series that is inviting us all to see the harvest and consider our role in it.
- And so I want to continue with where I left off in last week’s sermon, with the final picture that I showed of the two mermaids of different backgrounds and ask again, that if this is what this harvest effect could be; making space for one another’s stories and backgrounds and experiences, if this is the potential outcome of it all...then what is so wrong with this?

- For these mermaids generated a lot of discussion in both of our adult and youth applying the sermon to life classes that meet on Wednesday.
- Furthermore, today at roughly 9:45, the youth are giving more information regarding mermaids for us to continue talking about with our Gather Us In time, downstairs in Black Fellowship Hall.
- So let's try to unpack my closing question to get the day started shall we? Why can't two mythological beings, of two different racial and ethnic backgrounds, swim together in the same harvest?
- Why did this Ariel of 2022 cause so many problems for some?
- For typically, if an animation goes to live video, I realize that most people would expect the live character to match the original animation.

- However is that really all that is bothering some I wonder?
- For the additional scripture that comes to mind that I think is timely to mention, that I believe will not only bring this little mermaid controversy into full light, it will also shed some light on our scriptural lessons today, is from Matthew 20:16, where it says, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”
- You see some scholars who discussed this on a Bible reference site that I came across, suggested that the parable of Matthew 20, is about Israel and the Gentiles, who will come into the kingdom by faith in Christ, making those who come through Christ first, even though they came to be included in the family of God last.

- Others hear Jesus, describing a general reversal in the kingdom of position and status on earth, making the rich poor and the lowly great; and we see this play out in our gospel lesson today.
- Still other teachers believe the meaning of the parable should be restricted to the disciples themselves; to quiet their arguing about who was greatest among them.
- The bottom line of the parable, however, seems to be that all are received and rewarded by God, **based on God's grace and nothing more.**
- For God gives much to those God wishes to, in Christ, based not on their worthiness, race, education status, social class and more;
- God gives much to us simply because of God's grace and unconditional love for us.

- Nevertheless, we know that the world in which we live in, typically does not operate in this manner.
- For we live in a world where unfortunately race matters,
- Our gender...it matters;
- Our sexuality...it matters;
- Our social status.... it matters;
- Our economic status... it matters;
- And back to this Little Mermaid live action film, dare I say **it matters**, that the Ariel mythological character that Disney chose, was that of a caramel skinned woman with red dreadlocks...**it matters**;
- As disturbing and challenging as my comments may be for some right now, trust me I am triggered too... **that it matters**;

- Therefore, I wonder if some of Matthew 20:16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last,” is lurking in some of our brains as it pertains to the Little Mermaid movie; for if the live action character would have been with a white skinned and red hair woman **first**, and then 5 years later, an African American version live action movie came out **second**?
- I wonder if this order would have made a tremendous difference for some?
- Not to mention if the trailer I showed last week, came out as a second live action movie and not the first, I do not believe that it would have acquired the 1.5 million dislikes it did; perhaps instead it would have only acquired only 3,000 dislikes!
- Therefore, I believe as I segue into our first lesson and Gospel this morning, that some of Matthew

20:16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last, are fueling these stories too.

- For the point that God would have us consider, that what we as a people tend to focus on **that matters** in this harvest, **is not what God feels really matters.**
- However, for some reason, as our gospel points out in verse 26, we tend to get consumed by this great chasm that has been fixed between us;
- For the definition of chasm, to ensure we are all on the same page with the context of what our gospel is saying,
- There are two definitions according to Merriam-Webster;
- The first if we were to take our gospel literally, the great chasm would refer to : a deep split or gap in

the earth; that could be separating these two worlds in our passage.

- The second meaning of chasm is *a profound difference between people, viewpoints, feelings, etc.*
- Therefore, our gospel in the parabolic sense for me is naming that this great chasm does not just exist between Lazarus and the rich man, but it is in every part of our daily lives.
- For **there is a great chasm** between races;
- **There is a great chasm** concerning human sexuality and gender;
- **There is a great chasm** between the haves and the have-nots; The rich and the poor;
- **There is a great chasm** in our health care system and pretty much every institution;



- **There is a great chasm** when we travel; first class, business class, coach and so on.
- **There is a great chasm** that has been engrained in our minds and fixed in our hearts, **whether we want to** acknowledge it or not;
- **Whether we want to** name it or not;
- **Whether we are ready to** own it or not;
- **This great chasm exists**— and oh you better believe, that there is always going to be a power struggle **for who gets to** set the order if all, **for who gets to** set the standards of it all, **for who gets to** frame the grand narrative of it all;
- Hence why the things that we as humanity tends to quibble over...**it all matters**....to most of us.
- For example, I asked our youth a question in our Youth Applying the Sermon to life that meets on

Wednesday nights at 6:45 pm downstairs in Black Fellowship Hall; the question of, “Would you rather be rich or poor?”

- Most of the youth’s responses were somewhere in the middle; mainly they wanted some money so that they could help others with having some resources.
- Most acknowledged that being poorer monetarily typically produced wealth in other areas; i.e. being rich with friends and family and so on.
- Then I asked them the question, “if they were to receive 300 zillion dollars, would they still be who they are today?” Would they still be nice and loving and so forth?
- The instructions that I gave them were to give me a thumbs up if they would remain the same, thumbs in the middle if they would be affected a little by the

money or thumbs down, if they knew they would be corrupted by the money.

- Interestingly enough, our younger students gave a thumbs up, meaning they would still be who they are, loving and kind, regardless of being a zillionaire.
- However, the older students from the 6th grade up, were able to articulate this very chasm that I have been naming, causing them to give me a thumbs in the middle....no one gave a complete thumbs down completely.
- However, this little exercise taught me and perhaps reveals to all of us, that it doesn't take much time to be alive in the world, for this great chasm to be fixed in our minds;
- Furthermore, this great chasm then becomes the work of the harvest, that will take a measure of

humility, confession and all of the fruits of the spirit we have been discussing for a number of weeks to be able to draw from, as we seek to remove these weeds, so that this harvest can really thrive.

- And this is where I celebrate our adult aspiring harvesters in our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life class, because the good news about this growing community, is that they have acknowledged this great chasm as well, and **have decided that it doesn't need to be there.**
- For each week, we come together in varied backgrounds, experiences and more, and I have to tell you what finally became the metaphorical camel that broke the great chasm's back in this community, was witnessing the impact of the African American girls seeing a representation of themselves in the Little Mermaid trailer.

- For how can one not be moved to tears at both of these Black and white girls looking on in awe of an Ariel regardless of color, who is just beautiful and talented too!
- Furthermore as a class that meets weekly, we have come to this communal understanding, that in this harvest, we wish to be able to celebrate the idea of everyone being seen and feeling seen in this harvest.
- As a class, we have acknowledged that half of the battle of breaking down this great chasm, involves addressing the fear that may come forth as a result of the chasm being removed altogether.
- For the root fear I believe that we all may have on some level, is that if there is no great chasm in the harvest fixed between us, then perhaps there will be no us.

- Perhaps our stories will just be stories.
- Perhaps our identities will become one big blur.
- Perhaps our opinions and thoughts would not matter.
- Perhaps the essence of who we are will be erased, replaced or dismissed altogether.
- And this my friends is just not true.
- For making space for one another as I see it is simply just that;
- Scooting over to make room at this infinite table for all to belong.
- Furthermore this is what God's harvest is really about from my perspective;
- For as I bring the message translation of 1 Timothy 6: 6-10, I believe it captures it best.

- A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough.

**9-10** But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time.

- You see Church, some scholars debate whether or not Paul actually wrote this letter, however the intent behind the letter is what is most important in my eyes;
- For Paul digresses again to make a personal appeal to Timothy, a **man of God**, in contrast with the impostors who made a god of gain, to not misunderstand what this harvest is really all about.
- For whether it is money we are seeking, fame, social status, being first, seeking power, keeping

our privilege; if this is our motivation, **we will self-destruct in no time.**

- Some might suggest we are already there, especially if being consumed by what is in the Little Mermaids sea is what is keeping some of us up at night.
- And where our gospel comes in, is we get to see this self-destruction play out through the eyes of the rich man.
- For scholars debate whether our gospel is a parable or not;
- Some in our class questioned if Lazarus was Mary and Martha's brother and I can say that he is not.
- For Lazarus in this sense, is noted more by the meaning of his name which means "God has helped."



- Either way parable or not, actual incident or not, you and I are witnessing a story that I am certain most of us can account for in our own every day harvest experiences.
- For **while on Earth**, Lazarus was **full of sores**, (an expression only here in New Testament).
- **While on Earth**, The beggar was **desiring to be fed** with the leftovers from the rich man's table (v. 21).
- **While on Earth**, the only ones who took pity on him were the dogs, who **licked his sores**, perhaps out of pity.
- I think it is a fine time to interject one of the questions one of our aspiring harvesters from class on Wednesday evening emailed me, "Does the harvest require funds?"

- And my answer to this question is while living on Earth, it appears so.
- But thank God, when it is all said and done, the answer to the question should be apparent.
- For then our parable or story reveals that both the rich man and Lazarus dies.
- First the beggar dies. Nothing is said about a funeral or burial. But he had **angels** for pallbearers. They carried him into **Abraham's bosom**.
- One of the Bible commentators I researched described the scene as : "Lazarus in Sheol reposes with his head on Abraham's breast, as a child in his father's lap, and shares his happiness." The commentator adds: "The expression is not common in Jewish writings; but Abraham is sometimes represented as welcoming the penitent into paradise."

- Either way as the reader of the text, I am relieved for Lazarus at this moment, because for me Lazarus is finally being seen in the harvest fully, and this gives me hope for all who have been placed along the margins, **that God fully sees us and loves us.**
- On the contrary, I am not celebrating the rich man's experience, for I do not believe that this passage is talking about rich people going to hell and poor people going to heaven.
- For I stopped by to also declare that God loves this rich man too!
- Therefore, I believe that this is the story of what happens to a person who doesn't get what this harvest is about and most unfortunately, does nothing to learn about it.

- The consequences reveal **the torments of one soul** who is enslaved by this great chasm;
- Furthermore, I believe that you and I are witnessing the **torments of one soul**, once they become aware that they have been deceived by this great chasm;
- **That they have been deceived by** the intoxication of wealth,
- **That they have been deceived by** the lure of privilege;
- **That they have been deceived by** the temptation of becoming the oppressor, only to realize that in the end they have been the one oppressed all along;

- You see our lessons today are a message of grace to all, whether we identify with Lazarus or identify with the rich man,
- To not get sidetracked by the great chasm that is fixed between us;
- To not get mesmerized by all that this great chasm may even promise....some of us.
- For it is harvest time; which means that our work involves removing this great chasm tax is fixed between us, for there are good and ripe opportunities available to us all to feast upon and—the greatest news is that there is enough to go around!
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