

Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes-- November 20, 2017

The scriptures for Sunday have a theme of gratitude. Gratitude is more than thankfulness; there is a relational element. It is reciprocal, inviting us into a relationship of giving and receiving.

Ask ourselves: Where does God fit into Thanksgiving?

Deuteronomy 8:7-18

The danger of the Israelites forgetting God once they had become prosperous may have a parallel in Methodism. The movement began among the working poor, but as they became frugal, avoided drunkenness, and helped each other they tended to rise into the middle class. Have we forgotten where we came from?

John Wesley wrote, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."

Was John Wesley similar to the apostle Paul, or different?

Wesley always wanted to be knocked off his horse. He believed there was a message.

John Wesley went through an evolution; from the Christian teachings in his upbringing, especially by his mother; his being part of the "Holy Club" at Oxford; his becoming a priest in the Church of England; and he and his brother Charles coming to America as missionaries, and returning to England feeling that they were failures. After his return, John had his experience at Aldersgate where he came to believe in justification by faith, not his good works, and he felt his heart "strangely warmed."

Where are we in relation to God, according to the text in Deuteronomy?

"Whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (v. 9). God foreordained that piece of land for them.

Is the entire world land that God has provided? We should "bloom where we are planted."

God gets the first fruits, not leftovers; that's what God gave us.

Follow the movement of the Spirit of God.

Do not exalt yourself (v. 14). Don't become haughty of heart and unmindful.

Remember what God has done.

Psalm 65

The tracks of the chariot "drip with fatness (v.11). Fat lubricates the axles so the wheels can roll with ease.

Nothing is outside of God's realm.

Signs (v. 8): strange weather in the news, changing the face of the earth.

Where does this psalm put us in relation to gratitude and God?
This is a coronation: God as king, provider, and ruler.
Nothing happens outside of that hierarchy.
This is confirmed by what the earth provides.
“Crowning the year with bounty” (v.11): celebrating the harvest.
Bounty of gratitude and faith—and you are well lubricated for the journey.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

What is the distinction between gratitude and indebtedness?
The gift too wonderful for words. Pure gift.
God loves a cheerful giver. It is better to give than to receive. You get a wonderful feeling in your heart. When we feel we don't have enough, still share.
During the Depression, everyone was bad off, and there was lots of sharing.
If we live sparingly—if we don't enter wholly into sharing—we are not living into our potential, the fullness of what life can be.
A stream flowing by itself does what it does. How much more it does when channeled into the mill.
Plant one seed and it multiplies. Jesus continually spoke of wheat and bread. Making bread was part of their culture.
A farmer takes his best seeds to plant. It will give what it is.
Sharing binds people together. The passage in Chapter 9 refers to a collection Paul was taking to help the church in Jerusalem. It served to connect the Jewish and Gentile Christians.
It also connected the rich and the poor; the Corinthian church was rich.
It is like turning a water spigot a little. You have to turn it to get water. Trust God to give it.
What percent of farmers think of what they are doing as helping others?
These days, you have to want to be a farmer, unlike earlier times when you inherited the family farm. Now, things are computerized.
Varieties of seeds have been developed that do not reproduce, so farmers have to buy new seeds every year.
If we go that route, we're killing the earth.
Technology always comes up against limits.
If there is no variety, one plant disease can wipe out everything.

Luke 17:11-19

The theology of thanks.

Made “whole” (v. 19, King James Version): the leper was restored to his family and community.

The Samaritan was rejected in Galilee. It takes so much to move us, who are spiritually privileged, to thanksgiving.

There was another story in the land, about Baal, who was associated with plants and crops. It explained everything and was a powerful story. It was hard for the Israelites to understand that their God of war was also God of the land. We need the old story, not Baal and his sister, but Yahweh.

The Eucharist and Passover are about telling the story.

Baal became ill and died. His sister slaughtered death and ground him into corn. This story explained everything. The Israelites had to tell a counter-story. Thanksgiving is an important time of the year, determining how your grandkids are going to grow up.

All ten lepers had enough faith to seek out Jesus to do what no one could do, and they were obedient (they were healed as they went). But only one came back and worshipped.

Who did the Samaritan go to?

No Jewish priest would say to a Samaritan, “You are clean.” But Jesus did.

Are we assuming the other nine were Jews?

The Samaritan went to the only priest who could declare him clean—Jesus.

What compelled the Samaritan to go back? What was planted in him from childhood?

A simple but profound sense of gratitude moved him into living it out.

Were the ten all friends? The bond of leprosy went beyond the conflict between Jews and Samaritans.

The Samaritan was impelled by the love of Christ. He received healing at such a deep level, as did the disciples and Mary and others, to break out of fear, be emboldened and impelled to go forth.

Note the word “priests” is plural.

Leviticus 14 provides the process for being declared clean.

There was a priest in every village. Did the lepers need to go to Jerusalem?

The bottom line is sin. What is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Take up your bed and walk”?

All ten had a chance for a relationship to God. Nine walked away because they were healthy now.

Matthew 25:31-46

Both groups addressed Jesus as Lord. This is not about nations; the church is being judged. Both groups professed his lordship, but only some lived it. Jesus separates the believing church from the professing church.

In the Victorian age, poor people lived in the sewers. They were considered the “unworthy poor.” People would only help the “worthy poor.” We’ve picked this up.

God raised up the Salvation Army.

Actions we can take to help the poor and needy: what if the person is unchurched, not “clothed... in compassion”? How do we respond? People starving for hope and faith, no well to draw on during trials—the church also needs to be concerned for spiritual needs. How can we share faith—and “hope within walking distance”?

Imprisoned women experience desolation from the pre-memory of their lives. They experience mistreatment. They are bred into addiction.

Prison is not just behind bars.

It starts when an addicted mother is impregnated by an addicted father. We need to explore ministries we are being called to, right here.

I might be afraid to hear the last sermon our pastor was going to preach. This (Matthew 25:31-46) was Jesus' last sermon, what it was all about for him. This is the most frightening scripture.

"It's not the things in the Bible that I don't understand that bother me, but the things I do understand." (Mark Twain?)

We are held accountable.

Matthew was a book for Jews of that time—understand what it meant to them, how they would have heard it. The offer of salvation goes to people who never had the law. It was a reversion to the covenant with Abraham.

Resurrection is the fulfillment.

And the proof to everyone that Jesus was who he said he was.