

Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

Sunday's Sermon

June 26, 2016

The Rev. Mr. Cameron P. Keyser

Pentecost 6-C

There isn't really a whole lot 'entertaining' to share with you from this morning's texts. Luke – who tradition says was probably a physician – is always so serious, and stern, somber and acute. I wonder if he ever smiled.

What a taskmaster he is – like your own physician who's always hounding you about eating right and exercising, losing weight and reducing stress...

Oh! - that's not *your* physician – that's *mine*. Sorry.

All of those are admirable, positive, "for your own good" kinds of things: loose that gut, start eating right - but, who wants to hear about 'em? Who's willing to put forth the effort, make the sacrifice to do any them?...

I just wish things were like they used to be – like back when I was 22: 140 pounds – trim, slim, wrinkle-free...eating volumes of anything I wanted, never gaining a mini-ounce...the only stress was deciding on what bar to hit this weekend...

Those were the "good old days," weren't they? Like the song "Try to Remember" from the Broadway musical *The Fantastics* puts it:

(singing) "Try to remember the kind of September when life was slow and oh, so mellow..."

Try to remember the kind of September when grass was green and grain was yellow...

Try to remember the kind of September when you were a tender and callow fellow...

Try to remember when life was so tender that no one wept - except the willow...

Try to remember when life was so tender that dreams were kept beside your pillow.

Deep in December, it's nice to remember the fire of September that made us mellow...

Try to remember – and if you remember, then follow..."

The "Good Old Days" – "when no one wept except the willow" - like the Amish: stop the clock, fixate on a sliver of time – for them about 1850 - as the 'ideal' time...the 'ideal' life, the 'ideal' church, the 'ideal' family...

We're a lot more like the Amish than we might want to believe: for each of us, there was - somewhere in the past- an 'ideal' time: when things were better for us, and we were "better," too - the simplicity of growing-up in the 1950s...the excitement of being a teenager in the 60s...reaching the apex of your career in the 70s...when our spouse was still with us, our kids were still little... the world – less complex.

Somewhere for each of we've carved in our hearts that 'perfect' time. and, often - like Adam and Eve on their way out of the Garden, or Lot's wife escaping Sodom and Gomorrah - we find ourselves looking over our shoulders, and quietly whispering to ourselves: *'If only we could go back - to the 'good ole days...'if only we could go back...'*

It's only natural, I suppose: to want to find that equilibrium again – that 'sweet spot' – like on a golf ball where the drive is perfect and the elation is so 'delicious.' But, it only makes us sad – if we dwell on it, and causes us to miss appreciating "the good ole day of 'today.'"

There were 'better days' for all of us in the past. No doubt. And we give thanks for each and every one of them: little gifts we unwrapped from God.

But '*today*' ain't all that bad, either – when you think about it: well, yes, things have changed: the color of the landscape of our lives - and of our hair - has taken on a different hue, but, we mostly still "work:" maybe a little slower than we once did, maybe a bit less precisely...but, we're still here – lookin' down at the blades and not up at the roots. We still laugh – and cry... smile and get furious...kid and get kidded. As John Cameron Swayze used to say on the early Timex commercials: we – *what?* 'Take a lickin' and keep on tickin!'

There were a lot of '*not so good*' days back then 'in the good ole days' as well – and we give God thanks for getting us thru those – relatively unscathed, more or less in one piece...We may be greatly distressed with the present: I know *I* am: distressed, sometimes terrified, about what the future will hold for Ronda and me as individuals, and for us as a people. But, the Good News is that the Kingdom of God comes not out of the past – but

out of the future! And if we allow ourselves to get bogged-down in some kind of ‘horse and buggy faith’ – thinking that God *may* have been here with us at one time, but he’s gone out camping in the wilderness today, two things will happen: we’ll not only miss the good stuff to come, but, we’d also be right – in a manner of speaking.

Throughout history, God has always been leading people out of their ‘wilderness:’ their past bondage and trouble, bad decisions and intentional ones, out from the darkness they’ve created to the light that only he can control: Abraham out of Ur – into a place he’d never been... Israel out of Egypt... Judah out of Babylon... *Trinity*: from the brink of closing to a future as bright as we’ll let God make it...and, he led *us* – one by one and name by name - out of the hell of death into the heaven of eternal life.

God has always been “there:” in the future: a step ahead, an arms’ length away, a disaster to pull us out of. But, we seldom look at the ‘big’ picture: the ‘good ole days’ in the past, the awesome days of today, and the indefinable days to come - *all together* like the unit that they are: the sum total of our life experience...and ask ourselves “Where is *God* in all this?:” the good, the bad, and the ugly. *We* like to take our lives apart, separate them, categorize them, and try to make our own “good old days” a reality of the present, saying - like the man this morning: ‘Lord, let me go and bury my father – *then* I’ll come follow you...’ wait ‘till my 401Ks’ a little fatter, this pain in my neck goes away...’till I get my kid outta’ high school: *then*, I’ll come follow you...”

But, Jesus will have none of it. “To follow me,” he says, “you must *leave* the past, *live* in the “today,” and *trust* in the future I’ve already got brewing. *You* may not know where things are heading, but *I* do. And, if you want to come along- I’ll never *force* you – if you want to head with me into the future of the Kingdom, then there will never be a better time than right now to start walking. Come on! I’m already there...”

But, sometimes – if you’re like me – you like the ‘Jesus in the Book’ better than the ‘Jesus in your heart.’ He’s so much tamer there – isolated from the crap that *I*

Sources Consulted

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The Chain Of Command by Alexander H. Wales

Queen Mary Stuart of Scotland (1542-1587), as cited in Ken Gire, ed. *Between Heaven and Earth*

Rev. Dr. J. Barrington Bates, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Essex Fells, New Jersey

Prayers and Reflections That Celebrate an Intimate God, HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, p. 89.

have to deal with just to get thru a day...easier to manipulate, and to use to reinforce my biases.

But, let Jesus come alive, and the expectations become anything but manipulative: he may cause us discomfort and inconvenience. He might pin us to the wall of our selfishness and hardness of heart...he might expose us to the Truth – about *us*, about our *world* – and, instead of taking sides in a political party, he’ll demand that we answer the truly important question: “If you’re not on *my* side, just *whose* side are you on?”

And, he’ll wait until we answer.

I actively tried to run things my own way for years: thinking that this ‘ministry thing’ might be a nice, rewarding thing to do – maybe even ‘cushy’ (Ha! What was I *thinkin’*?) – but, I’d do it on *my* time and in my way: casually and comfortably: after I got these couple of businesses up and running, after I understood fully just what it was all about. “I’m *gonna*’ do it, Jesus – because I like the things they say about you in the Book...”

But, the casual, comfortable “way” never came: never a door opened, or even a window got cracked. “Let me go tend my field, bury my father, get a little happier, build my nest egg, *then* I’ll come follow you, Jesus – when it’s *easier*.”

But, Jesus would have none of that.

“*Now* is the time, and here are the *car* keys,” he finally made clear. And, within 3 months, I was putting down the daily 2 hour one-way commute from Charlotte to Columbia – in an old 5 speed VW Jetta on which I put more than a hundred thousand miles.

But, guess what?: when I finished seminary, that was the only car I’d *ever* had that I got *more* for it when I sold it than what I’d *paid*! The “time” was “right.”

We function in 2 very different time “zones:” Chronos – meaning ‘*our*’ time: 11am, 2pm, Tuesday, Sunday...”*Timex* time;” and Kronos – *God’s* time: the ‘right’ time. The perfect time.

“Ya wanna’ follow me?,” he asks. “Then take me out of the Book and put me in your heart. At least *that* way, your hands will be free to do the job to which I’m calling you. And I’ll be there: like I was in the past, like I am now in the present – I’ll be there in your future. Now start that damn car. I’m tired of waiting.” Amen.

Abingdon Preacher's Annual, 1992, p.208)

Club Sandwich by Jess Moody

The Divine Advocacy by Maurice A. Fetty

Exegetical Notes, Brian Stoffreg, David E. Leininger

Comments and Observations, Scott Hoezee,