

GOOD

Sermon for Pentecost 5A-Mt 13:1-9, 18-23

LPC, 7/13/14

This will be an unusual sermon. I am moved to show you the fruits of the sabbatical you gave me – the first four weeks of thirteen which I plan to take over the next two years. Believe me that I haven't forgotten for a moment that this sabbatical is your gift to me, and I am grateful. Thank you.

As you know I spent the first two weeks in class as part of my DMin studies. Here are the books I read, including three on here [Kindle.]

Here are the notes I took.

This is approximately the amount of paper I need to fill in the next month as I write my papers.

You probably also know that I expected to spend my third week away seeing family. This I did, but not exactly the way I expected. If you are on Facebook you know that my mother was rushed into emergency surgery and had a lemon-sized cancer removed from her digestive tract. She is doing well and is now home. The tests, thank God, show no further involvement. My sister and brother and I were all there, and our family time ended up being no less special for being spent mostly in a hospital. In fact, perhaps it was more special.

I don't have much to show for this period except this.

This is my grandchild's christening gown. He/she is expected in late August and, God willing, will be baptized in this sometime in November. Rich and I had a very special chance to visit with his/her parents, my son and daughter-in-law, too. I got some substantial work done on this dress at my mother's bedside, and that makes it rather special too, uniting, as it does, four generations.

I spent my final week on retreat at John XXIII Pastoral Center in Charleston. Although I can't show you the major benefits of that, which are here in my heart, but I can show you a few tangible things, because with my spiritual director's blessing, I spent a lot of time in the art room.

This sculpture is called "Cloister and Font."

This painting is called "Pharaoh's Daughter."

And this 'installation' is called "The Think-Big Cross."

If you want a closer look or commentary on any of this, just ask me later.

I also filled this journal and wrote some poetry I'm not ready to share yet.

So I hope from this tangible evidence you can believe that your gift to me of four weeks was not wasted.

And now, probably to your great relief, I do have a homiletic message which is simply this: GOD IS GOOD.

I apologize if you were looking for something deeper, but I truly can't think of anything I want to tell you more. I can't think of anything more important for you to hear, know in your heart, and make your own. GOD IS GOOD.

I would hope that each of us not only knows this intellectually but knows it by heart, each in his or her own way. I pray that collectively, as Lawrencefield Parish Church, we can live into the truth that God is good, and make this truth known abroad. We are, after all, something of a beacon on a hill here. If we shine forth the truth that God is good to all around, we will be doing God's work for sure.

As full as I am with the riches of sabbatical, I can't neglect today's scriptures, but even these I believe shine forth with the same message: GOD IS GOOD.

This parable of the sower is frequently taken to mean that different people are different kinds of soil. People obviously respond to God's word in different ways after all and some of us are more productive afterwards than others.

Here's my advice: Please don't let's get hung up on trying to figure out what kind of soil we are. Whatever we do, let's not get involved in diagnosing what kind of soil other people are.

Instead, let's concentrate on the sower. When you think about it, this sower either simple or careless, wasting seed on beaten earth, and rocks and thorns. Or maybe something else is going on. Maybe this sower is neither simple nor careless but just extravagant and relentlessly, ridiculously, hopeful. This sower broadcasts everywhere, even in unlikely places, on the chance of getting a response. This sower does not want to take the chance that any soil, however unlikely, is denied the opportunity to be productive.

Such is our God. God sows God's grace extravagantly, relentlessly, ridiculously all over the place because God would deny no person the opportunity to be productive. That is what God is, gracious and generous and GOOD.

One of the classes I took last month, "Spirituality, Liturgy and the Arts," gave examples of how to introduce the fine arts into worship. I searched online for artwork on the parable of the sower to accompany this sermon. There were many "hits," of varying quality, most of them literally showing a sower casting seed. But the one I liked best was a photo showing a blade of grass growing out of a crack in pavement. What that picture says to me is that God does not confine God's attention, grace, and love to freshly tilled, receptive, rich loam, but touches even the most barren surfaces.

Some of us are loam. And, let's face it, some of us are asphalt. It doesn't matter. God's love pours on us all. Because GOD IS GOOD.