

Power Worthy

Wayne Waibel – 10/11/20

We are presented with some very difficult texts this morning. From the wrath of God being persuaded quite effectively by Moses – through the impassioned pleas of Paul to his beloved church in Philippi to stand fast in the Lord – to the final of three parables issued by Jesus to the Chief Priests and elders of Israel that escalates further their desire to be rid of Him.

As we meander through our daily life, the opportunity to reflect on these challenging passages presents in the midst of a global pandemic, national political upheaval and an increased urgency on the matter of social unrest in general and racial inequities that began long, long ago in specific. Thank goodness the Vikings finally won a game.

I know it's a pretty small matter, but I really struggled with a sermon title this week. I don't believe anyone has ever remarked on my titles, so it's a safe bet that they really only matter to me. I land on a title well before I put pen to paper so you could say that I write the sermon into the title – not the other way around. That kind of keeps me on point, so I wander off topic less. At least that's the theory.

For some reason the lectionary presented a little more intense than usual this week what with getting hammered yet again with a parable from Jesus. This one likens the kingdom of heaven to a king that is so offended by a wedding guest from off the street because of his attire, that he casts him into the outer darkness? That's one cranky king!

Then the supporting text is the episode from Exodus that documents the Lord's wrath with the children of Israel. Wrath to the tune of eliminating them with extreme prejudice, and starting the process all over again with Moses in place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Humankind is on very shaky ground.

As all of these stories percolate in my head, it's Friday morning, and LuAnn needs a sermon title before she can start cranking out the bulletin. The pressure is on and for some unknown reason, **Power Worthy** pops into my head. I run with it hoping (as usual) to find a relevance during the crafting phase of the sermon.

~~~~~

What we have here in story form is an account of the theology of covenant relations between God and humankind. Matthew's version differs slightly from the other synoptic Gospels in that he adds the man without appropriate wedding attire. And this exception leads to the thematic conclusion identical to the Parable of the Vineyard from three weeks ago – "Many are called, but few are chosen."

It's a simple phrase that somehow escapes a much-needed explanation. But, in an examination of the Old Testament, we can ascertain the importance of being worthy of power. This can in turn inform our clarification.

Moses reminds God of His covenantal obligation to the children of Israel, despite their ongoing disregard for the same covenant. The kicker is when Moses offers the Egyptian perspective "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth.'"

This is where God justifies His power worthiness in that he maintains the capacity to relent. This God of ours is truly awesome. He allows Jacob to defeat Him and garnish a blessing as a result, and He allows Moses to talk Him out of destroying His chosen people.

And now Jesus is extending that power worth to all humankind in the form of a new covenant - and a warning. With the grace of election (many are called) – comes the obligation of obedience (few are chosen). We do not earn grace – it is granted unto us, but – we are commanded to be obedient.

“No other gods before Me.” “Love one another as I have loved you.” Live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” “Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Gospel living only begins with the invitation – the essential element is a transformed life.

---

I know that parables by definition are to be interpreted as analogous, and by those standards, today’s can be seemingly harsh, but we must remember that they were written for a very specific audience that was engaged in a mighty struggle for survival. Our lens is completely different, so we are encouraged to adjust our take-aways accordingly.

If Aaron can readily cave to the will of a stiff-necked people provoking God Almighty to an extinction level event, and then become the Chief Priest to those same people, we’ve all got a shot at redemption.

---

Aside from God, who then is power worthy? Certainly not those who would seek it, so that eliminates just about everyone actively campaigning for a political office. The reason I don't use an absolute there is because I'd like to think there are one or two folks out there who are running as a form of servitude. They're looking to give back to a system they feel beholden to for the good it can occasionally do.

If we conclude that God alone is worthy of the power He has, we have cause for great joy. Human power is shallow and fleeting, but we're okay with that. God in Christ is near to us at all times. And God among us renders all other power obsolete, and His alone – absolute.

In the dark days ahead, we can be certain that joy takes root even within dire circumstances. For joy is the command for all who know Christ. Joy and life beyond constant worry come about when we perceive God's perfect touch, especially in the midst of difficulty and pain. Amen.