

Message November 5, 2023 Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church
“Joyful Generosity: Share in Justice & Love” Rev. Trish Eckert

On this All-Saints Day, as we contemplate frameworks of justice and acts of love, both of our Bible Wisdom teachings reference the end times. The Book of Revelation can be a difficult text to understand, and often we avoid it, but this morning’s short reading invites us to consider how we hear the promises in Revelation. Are they to be fulfilled in some far distant future or might we get glimmers of them coming true even now?

Contrary to popular apocalyptic thinking, there is no “rapture” or a future snatching of Christians up from the earth in Revelation. Instead, it is God who is “raptured” down to earth to take up residence among us. The radiant new city that we heard about this morning fulfills Isaiah’s promises of newness, as well as promises from Ezekiel and Zechariah. Belief in a heavenly Jerusalem was widespread in biblical times. What is so striking in Revelation, is that this heavenly city descends from heaven down to earth. The city that descends from heaven invites us all to enter as citizens and to “inherit” its blessings, as God’s children.

The book that we read during Kid’s Time was inspired by the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (speaking of saints). ;) When I was searching through commentaries and other resources this week about generosity, justice, and love, I came across more of Tutu’s thinking in a wonderful book that he cowrote with Douglas Abrams, entitled: “God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time.” This book echoes the children’s book that was shared this morning. He envisions God’s dream for the world through a message of hope, justice, peace, and inclusion. He wrote, “Dear Child of God, before we can become God’s partners, we must know what God wants for us. ‘I have a dream,’ God says. ‘Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God’s family, My family.’”

In God’s family, there are no outsiders. All are insiders. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Palestinian and Israeli, Roman Catholic and Protestant, Serb and Albanian, Hutu and Tutsi, Muslim and Christian, Buddhist and Hindu, Pakistani and Indian—all belong....

We have heard of God’s dream from His prophets throughout history and in modern times from great leaders and humanitarians like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi (people that many of us also count as saints). King spoke of God’s dream when he dreamed of the day that those of former slaves and those of former slave owners would be able “to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” Gandhi wrote about God’s dream in 1929 when he stated that his goal was not just the brotherhood of

Indian humanity but “the mission of the brotherhood of man.” (Today they would have referred to daughters and sisterhood, too.) The visions and triumphs of these prophets of God helped change their nations and inspire the rest of us around the world in our own struggles for equality.

God’s dream for an inclusive community was embodied in Jesus. By looking at the life of Jesus, we see what God asks of us. Jesus came into a deeply divided and polarized society. There was the divide between the hated foreign oppressor and the citizens of the vassal state. Within Judaism there were different religious groupings, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots. There was the divide between the Jew, the Gentile, and the Samaritan. And then men were segregated from women. There were free persons and there were slaves. There were the rich; there were the poor. The world saw a veritable miracle unfolding before its very eyes as all sorts and conditions of women and men, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile—all these came to belong in one fellowship, one communion. They did not regard one another just as equals – (that in itself would have been a huge miracle) - they regarded one another not just as equals but as sisters and brothers, members of one family, God’s family.

The only description of the last judgment in the New Testament shows up in Matthew 25. There are stacks of scholarly work and theological study about the end times. Yet, in this text, there is nothing in it about ecclesiastical connections or religious practices. There is not a word in this passage about theology, creeds, or orthodoxies. There is only one criterion here, and that is whether or not you see Jesus Christ in the face of the needy and whether or not you give yourself away in love in Christ’s name.

As I often say, it’s simple, but not easy. Ultimately, beyond the social, political, economic, or religious aspects of this familiar reading from Matthew, it is the personal that is at the center of this text. God wants not only a new world modeled on the values of Jesus. God wants us – each of us. God is not a social engineer but a God of love who wants to *save our souls*, to use the language of the old revival meetings.

God wants to save our souls and redeem us and give us the gift of life – true, deep authentic human life.

God wants to save us by touching our hearts with love. God wants to save us by persuading us to care and see other beings who need us.

God wants to save us from obsessing about ourselves, our own needs, by persuading us to focus on concern and care for others.

That is God’s favorite project: to teach you and me the fundamental lesson, the secret, the truth – that to love is to live. Amen.