

Proper 18C, Labor Day, Baptism, "Give it Up"

Lections: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Ps. 139: 1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Welcome to church, Stratton family and friends. Taking all of today's texts seriously we're going to ask you to be serious about Isaac's baptism, and your own. We're going to be asking ourselves as a community of faith if we too have understood what it means to belong to God.

The gospel lesson alone is going to make us pay attention. This is one Sunday when I want the Jesus Seminar scholars to tell me he really didn't say that – hate your family, give up all of your possessions if you want to be a disciple.

"When a University of Winnipeg professor asked students to experiment with simple living, Jeremy Doerksen decided he would downscale his material possessions enough to out fit an immigrant family in need. Here's what he said, 'I no longer wanted to be a part of the cycle of consumption. I wanted to make a statement that modesty and sufficiency are sustainable values richer in meaning than acquiring possessions. I asked an acquaintance at a refugee center to see if there was a family in need of some basic household items. I was put in touch with a family of seven who had arrived in Winnipeg 2 years ago but still needed basic items. After hearing just a sliver of their story I was inspired to look further into the conflict that had forced their immigration...I also learned that the systemic problems (in society) are far greater than one family receiving my excess possessions.'" Quoted in Geez magazine, Fall 2010, pp/ 62,63.

Being a disciple means taking a hard look at the life we are living; we may need to 'give it up.' One minister in a high steeple church in North Carolina told his congregation that if they didn't heed that gospel they should renounce their baptisms. We have not asked for moving vans to come to your house this week, but we do believe that faithful living means that we take seriously the lives others have to live, and respond.

The women at Cornerstone need blankets. We have just delivered some school supplies for Tools4Schools. We're supporting a peanut butter project in Lesotho through Brian Morton and Joanne Rawlinson who are walking a portion of the Camino de Compostelo this month. The church is always, always going to be asking its people to 'give it up.'

We are taking Isaac into this family today. His baptism means that our family values will become his – all are welcome here, our hospitality to diversity means that difference is a good thing. We all probably know that some families have unhealthy patterns. I don't think Jesus would have used the word dysfunctional, but I think he did know that families tend to be exclusive; that they can claim allegiances and loyalties that are far from life-giving. The church rejoices that right now two warring families are sitting down to talk peace; they have to give up their old hatreds and learn a new thing. I am talking about Israel and Palestine.

Paul is asking Philemon to give up his ownership of the slave Onesimus. As a Christian he is now to live into a new relationship, as brother to the one had served him and wronged him by running away. A new friend is a Baptist minister in Toronto who works with immigrant nannies whose jobs have enslaved them. Christians are called to challenge injustice, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. We give up power and privilege for a role of serving the dignity of every human person.

The psalmist speaks of a God who seeks him out and knows him, a God who is intimately involved in our individual humanity. “The poet of psalm 139 knew the panic impulse to flee being known by God. He knows the joy of physical existence, the delight of being human and alive but also the fear of a searching examination” by the One through whom all things were made. We give up the sense that we make ourselves. In church we say that Isaac – and each one of us – is a gift from God. The mystery and wonder of our lives, the cultivation of our sacred character, the absolute delight and love we encounter in relationship, brings us to awe and gratitude as we give praise up to God.

Jeremiah goes down to the potter’s house where what he sees allows him to hear God’s intention. The sad reality in the text is that Judah is a spoiled pot; it has not taken the shape that God intended. God, through the prophet, is delivering a challenge: change your ways or risk destruction.

It is true that the church as an institution has often failed to live out God’s intention. And it is also true that daily it is being reshaped by those who take the challenges of faith seriously. I believe that this community of faith is a place where Isaac – and all of you – can be nurtured in the love of God and of neighbor. It’s time for his baptism; are you ready to give him up?

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