

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Seminarian Elloitt Drake

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The first word of the Gospel from today, “Listen” may be seen as a request to us.

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus had been in lengthy dialogue with the Pharisees. By this chapter, leading up to the passion, the Pharisees are growing increasingly tired of Jesus’, who is, from their perspective, only agitating against their habits and traditions. They don’t see the good. When they hear the parable, they tell Jesus that the tenants got what they deserved before realizing that are just like the tenants, robbing the religious communities of the spiritual food that Jesus gives freely.

The tenants are trying to have the harvest all to themselves. It’s a hard thought in this consumerist, materially dependent society, that the produce really is all God’s. The same God who doesn’t regard the lowly as less than the distinguished. These Pharisees are angry at being undermined by this new Rabbi, and they miss that God is calling them to peace and to trust. Looking instead to their own plans, they are unaware of Spiritual fruit! “Listen to another parable” Jesus asks them. “And remember who’s vineyard this is”

When we are broken and low, the Spirit is there as we grow, reminding us of a new light that shines.

I do think Jesus was bragging though, asking us to listen. If God’s good at anything, and if we have a deficit in anything, it is listening. Still, thank God that God listens to us, and brings us to new, beautiful grassy plains, shining in with truth when we are stuck.

“Listen to another parable,” Jesus begins...

A friend once asked me, if I knew how to make God laugh. When I told her that I didn't, she replied, simply, “tell God your plans.”

No matter how much we try to plan ahead, we won't be better than God, or have the inheritance of the Son all for ourselves. Unlike these tenants, or these Pharisees, Jesus was relational, and trusted God's love as he went forth healing many. That is why we give thanks in the first place. God's answer sustains us, heals us, and shapes us, so that we may know love and share it with others; it is God's love, active in faith. Look around. See how much we have? Do we trust God with it? Or do we trust ourselves?

Not everyone is listening to God's offering in this parable, to listen to the calling to live into God's Kindom. There are protests in Catalonia, in Togo, and in St. Louis. Who's listening to them?

There was a man in Las Vegas last week who lost any sort of good faith, and stole many siblings from us. In Puerto Rico, where the eye of Hurricane Maria moved directly over, people and infrastructure were devastated alongside an already brittle economy. And this U.S. government has the nerve, in such a materially privileged country, to say to this commonwealth, “Hey! You've thrown off our groove. We're already taking care of Texas and Florida. What do you expect from us?”

Early one morning, I go out for a run to clear my head. There's so much unrest and chaos happening, it seems too much for me handle really. I think about this passage for a while, and hope gently begins to bubble up.

As this scripture plays through my head, I open my eyes to the people who are out and about enjoying the day. The lake comes into view - people are walking, running and

cycling. I haven't been out this early much in Chicago, so I'm surprised to see how calm and how energized other people look at 6:30 in the morning. I've only been here for a year. Rounding a bend, there's nine students, guided in breath, stretching with a yoga instructor. As the sun crests and tinges the sky orange, literally just peaking up over the horizon, it brushes the landscape with golden rays. Further down the beach there's more than a hundred people, who are standing, swimming or chatting down by the water.

Heading back towards town, my growing elation in the unruffled lakeshore fades. I begin to review plans for the day and feel familiar anxiety creeping in. On the street, others seem hurried now too. The smells of those grasses by the lake, from the waves lapping, and the sun rising, they all vanish, replaced by traffic sounds, hustle and buildings on the horizon.

Still,

still

We are bid to listen towards God's abundant peace surpassing all.

I give silent thanks for the tranquility of having been near with Lake Michigan, and ask for God's presence for this day. Sirens go off, and somewhere, people are out helping one another.

At the end of the Matthew passage, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23, by remembering that "this is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes". Isn't it? Isn't there time in our lives to look around, and breath, and see that what the Lord does is better, fuller than our plans alone? Surely, we have to plan, but Christ's reign on earth is here, even now. How amazing is it, that the crosses that people bear are real. Each person really does "get by with a little bit of help, from God, and from their friends". How much

do we really have to offer our neighbor, when you stop and think about it? Not much on our own. God wakes me up in the morning, and lays me down at night. I am able to share with my neighbor, in God's abundant harvest.

So listen.

Does the day ahead really need to be approached with a different calmness than during mornings by the lake? Sometimes. God's world asks only that we return, and remember to listen... because the cornerstone that the builders rejected is here, in the smallest acts of faith.