

Proper 23C – October 14, 2019

Job 23: 1-9, 16-17

Psalms 22: 1-15

Hebrews 4: 12-16

Mark 10: 17-31

The Rev. Preston Lentz  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

### GROSS OR NET

It's amazing to me what a fascinating sense of humor God has. For example, the last time I stood in the pulpit here at St. Christopher's...that one right there...I was wearing a red muumuu and a wig. You see, it was Stewardship "season" 1985 and Mike Braham and I had agreed to head up the campaign. So, out came "Prestonia" and off we went! Now, here I am, again, addressing you and, again, during Stewardship "season."

Mary Ann and I received our pledge letter in yesterday's mail. I'd like to thank all the Vestry for their TIME, the STORIES they have shared with us, and for their COMMITMENT to St. Christopher's. Their "Transforming Generosity" is a wonderful example of leadership. Growing up in Alabama, one of the expressions I heard frequently was "The fish stinks from the head." Our vestry is smelly with grace and faith!

Nearly every day...in fact, I'm willing to bet EVERY day...each and everyone of us silently asks for help with an issue impacting our lives. It could be business related or personal. Quite often we find ourselves asking God for help in understanding what's going on around us. For instance "She never smoked. How'd she get lung cancer?" Another example might be "Would someone explain to me why we continue to spend so much money on the Homeless? Nothing changes." Or, "I feel lost; but, I'm afraid to ask for help...and besides, who'd I ask?" In each of the examples, WE don't have answers and are searching. WE don't know where or how to look for the answers.

This is exactly how we find Job in this morning's Old Testament lesson. He doesn't understand why things have happened to him...he knows what's happened (scraping boils and rashes with broken pottery is pretty clear)...but he doesn't understand WHY. If he could only find God, he could ask Him what happened; and he has faith God would heed his questions not from a position of overwhelming power but with reason and patience. After, all, this is how God responded to Abraham and Moses. However, Job can't find God. The despair in those final verses is heartrending in its grief.

And yet, what do we find in Paul's letter to the Hebrews? We find Paul assuring his audience almost two thousand years ago and us right here today that through Jesus, our Great High priest sent by God, we can have FAITH and TRUST that we can "approach the throne of Grace with boldness" and receive mercy and find grace in our time of need. It is because Jesus is fully Human, as he is fully Divine, that We are KNOWN ("all are naked and laid bare"), the intentions of our hearts understood, and that we are loved. We are SEEN in all our weaknesses and just as we are.

Before I turn to the Gospel reading from Mark, I'd like to ask all of us two questions: How often do we ask for help? And, how have we felt when that answer isn't at all what we expected, anticipated, or wanted? Do we respond with anger? Defensively? Or do we stop asking?

In the Gospel, a man runs to Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, to become a member of the radically new COMMUNITY Jesus is creating. Note however a few key points. First, the Commandments Jesus mentions are all the social and political ones; the ones for THIS world, the ones we can keep with a scorecard. Murder...Nope, not today. Adultery...check that one off. And so on. Jesus KNOWS that the man has kept all these and, in his love for him, gives him the answer for which he is not prepared and which he cannot accept: that he must respond from his HEART. Secondly, Jesus, again in Love, tells the man not just to sell what he owns, he tells him to GIVE THE PROCEEDS TO THE POOR. And, the man goes away grieving because he while knows what he needs to do; he just can't bring himself to take the step. And, he misses the equality that is such a core part of the new Community.

Although the man in the encounter has led a righteous life and Jesus knows this...after all he sees his heart barren and naked and loves him...he is searching for something beyond the requirements of THIS life so much so that he RUNS to Jesus and kneels before him. In Jesus' answer, the man cannot understand that Jesus is offering the path to ABUNDANCE from SCARCITY. He can only see the reverse. He can only understand it in terms of his world: what he owns and his possessions. He prevents himself from the Truth and the fullness of life. He goes away grieving.

The disciples have this same problem. They equate God's favor with the trappings of this world. It is, once again, Peter who asks the question that we so often ask: What about us? We've given up everything, to follow you: family, friends, jobs...everything. What about us?

Jesus tells Peter two things...and note the second...that those, like Job, who remain steadfast in Faith and Belief will have recompense almost beyond comprehension (one hundredfold!) and, that this reward...the new houses, fields, families, the new community...will come with persecutions, external and internal.

Here we find ourselves right in the middle of Mark's story. Although we can imagine Job's rashes and boils and his confusion and fear, although we can wonder sometimes about standing "naked and bare" before God, we have trouble responding to Jesus's simple yet all-encompassing request: Sell everything, give the proceeds to the poor, and receive treasure in heaven. "Everything" has so many connotations for each of us. The actions Jesus seeks from us also come in many forms. Ultimately, they require a life of Faith, of believing in the "unseen" and not this world. Of seeing the beauty of this world in the context of the NEW COMMUNITY, of care and compassion.

Here we find ourselves at the nexus of Stewardship. While we tell ourselves we'd like to live in a world where we give ourselves to God in terms of FULLNESS, we just cannot let go of the "persecutions" of this world ("How would I pay the mortgage?" "My friends will think I've

become some sort of Religious loony.” And on and on.) and thus we attempt to come to terms with the God relationship on our terms.

This is not about our checkbooks. This is about our lives. Our relationships with each other and with God all of which flows from the two great commandments: To love God with every fiber of our being; and, To love each other as ourselves ...ALL of the “other” (God’s “widows’ orphans, and aliens,” the homeless, immigrants, our enemies). In so doing, we live into ABUNDANCE of Faith from the true SCARCITY of “Possessions” and Owning – whatever form they take for us.

Job fears that he cannot find God and thus cannot find answers. The man in this morning’s Gospel, finds God however he cannot deal with the answer of what is necessary for the eternal life he desperately seeks. Paul assures us that we are seen and known for ourselves as who we are. That in this being seen and accepted we know we can seek and find God. God will, ultimately and in ways and for reasons unknown to us, love us and hold us “as may be best for us.” The deeper we each delve into our lives and faith, the more we find the ABUNDANCE of God’s Love and Grace. TRANSFORMING GENEROSITY, INDEED!  
Amen