

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

18 Pentecost
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“The Bucket List”

Today’s readings highlight the theme of forgiveness. Forgiveness like mercy has two sides. We seek forgiveness and we ourselves forgive. Jesus demonstrates both aspects in the Gospel parable of the ‘Unjust Steward.’

Forgiveness becomes a dilemma for us when it conflicts with other principles we hold such as justice. We find it hard to forgive the perpetrators of 9/11, because we see no justice in sight for the victims seven years after the event.

Yet, we know that in the Gospel Jesus calls for us to forgive unconditionally. Jesus teaches that we should always forgive. It is a complete reversal of the call in the Old Testament for vengeance and revenge. In the Exodus reading we learn of the terrible fate of the Egyptian army as God’s wrath causes them to perish in the Red Sea.

Jesus in Chapter 18 of Matthew attempts to elevate mankind to a new level of existence, where forgiveness is the norm and not merely the exception. There are a few circumstances in life where we or those we love, are always forgiven. Family is perhaps the best example. We forgive those that we love and they in turn forgive us.

Jesus strives to extend this Philosophy of forgiveness to all who would belong to the Kingdom of God. Paul wants to ask the question: “Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?” Don’t you know that we are each accountable to God alone for our lives?

I have a strong feeling that it is not what we have done, or even done wrong, that we will need forgiveness for. Rather, I think we will need the greatest forgiveness for those things we have not done. The missed opportunities, the chances we let slip by; the road in the wood that we did not choose to travel; the dream that we had in our youth that we allowed to die. It is not our weakness and sin that God will condemn us for, but our neglect and the fact that we wasted away the talents he gave us, and most of all that we neglected love.

There is a DVD movie out at the moment, called “The Bucket List” It is the story of two men dying of cancer, who in the final six months of their lives get one more chance to do the things they always wanted to do in life, from driving fast in a racing car, to climbing a high mountain. All the things they wanted to do before they kicked the bucket.

It will happen to all of us. The world was here before we were ever born; it will be here long after our mere 80 years are gone. The only question we need ask ourselves is: “did we make a difference?”

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Maybe you too have a bucket list. If you haven't perhaps it is time to think of writing one.

I have two bucket lists. One relates to this old Cobblestone Church, and the other has to do with things I should have done in my life, but never got around to.

Imagine, knowing of his impending death the things that went through Jesus' head in those last days of his life. Surely, he questioned if he had done enough. Had he made a difference? Were his disciples ready? Would they stand firm and continue his work or would their faith fail and would they run away? Did he still have a list of things that needed doing?

There is not one of those men and women, who Jesus called his disciples, who were in any way as bright, intelligent or talented as each and every one of you. How could they be? They were fishermen, farmers and simple folk. They did not have your upbringing education or talent. Yet, in a few short years they took over the Roman Empire.

How much more could we achieve as individuals and as a church, if we ever decided that we would use our talent, our intelligence and commit our lives to working for the person we call Jesus Christ?

Would it be asking an awful lot to expect each one of us to set ourselves ten goals to achieve for our faith in the coming year? It would be such a demand on our time. Can you imagine drawing up such a bucket list?

1. To be in church each and every Sunday.
2. Join the choir and train our voice for God's praise
3. Volunteer for one fundraiser event.
4. Resolve to pray to the Father for 10 minutes each day.
5. Go to one Bible study per month or at least spend time with a passage
6. Be faithful to one ministry in the entire year.
7. Write to an old friend
8. Visit one shut-in once a month for a year
9. Forgive an enemy
10. Go out of your way to make a new friend

You might think that is an impossible task or set of opportunities, for one year. Where would we get the time? Is it possible that some TV show was not worth watching or there was indeed a movie we had seen before or a Yankee game where we could predict the result?

For if we cannot make time to fit God, prayer and the living Gospel into our packed and accelerated lives, when do we think we are ever going to achieve union with God? If not in this life then when? God is waiting. He is not just waiting he is calling to us. Our life clock

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is ticking. It is winding down. This is not a rehearsal nor is it a drill. This is the real thing. How long before our God asks you and me: “What did you do with the talents I gave you? What happened to the opportunities I offered you?”

“Please tell me that the prison ministry in Pike County Jail was more important to you than “Survivor” or “American Idol?”

Tell me that feeding the poor on Friday night for one hour in the Food Pantry was more important to you than waxing the shine on your new SUV.”

You cannot tell God you found no opportunity in 20 years for Evangelism, when you never invited a single friend to come to church.

When it comes to our lives and our faith, God our Father has a “Bucket list” of his own. It says:

1. When are you going to treat my son as the Lord of your life?
2. When will you realize that I chose you for a special person and to you I gave the keys to win hearts for my Kingdom?
3. Each day I called to you and waited for your response in prayer. I gave you a manual, but you never read it.
4. I leveled the hills before you and paved the path through life that you might walk, but you walked far from me.
5. I saw you sad and broken hearted unable to fix what was broken in your life, but you ignored my outstretched arms and relied on your own frail self.
6. I weighed the scales of life in your favor and you took all the credit and squandered my gifts on house and things of your own.
7. I offered to lead you up a mountain to see with the eyes of learning and wisdom, but you preferred to bask in ignorance and earthly matter.
8. I showed you miracles from your first born to the wonders of healing and you called it science.
9. I gave you pain and a cross to carry and you rejected it in favor of a quick fix; when it could have helped you help others.
10. I gave you love; you should have planted it deep in hearts and watched it grow.

Yet, beyond this believe that I love and forgive you now and always you Father in heaven.

With St. Paul let us place some urgency into our lives. The day will come when we will no longer be able to accomplish those things we dream of doing. The Gospel is a fierce taskmaster; it races towards the coming of the Kingdom. It demands that we Christians commit, with passion to the task of making Christ’s teaching come alive each and every day. This is real Stewardship. This is the Gospel. “If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord.”

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Let us as a church and as individuals lay judgment on ourselves this Stewardship season and ask ourselves the question: Am I doing enough to merit the title disciple of Christ and how can I do more? Not how much can I give in money, or pledge, but rather: "Where is my bucket list? Where is my bucket list for Jesus? How can I live that Gospel in 10 practical ways in the next 12 months? How can I give back to God for the talents he has given me?"

How can I choose to do the work of the Gospel, when I never walk in the yellow wood and never give myself the opportunity to walk and chose God's way?

Amen+

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