

October 7th 2018 Thanksgiving Sunday and World Communion Sunday

Scripture:

Psalm 145

Exodus 16: 2-15

Matthew 20: 1-16

“The upside down/backwards world of God’s grace.”

“Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent ---- and instead flew straight into the ground --- crashed and died. She was completely unaware that she had been flying upside down.”

In away this is a metaphor for our culture ---- flying upside down without even realizing it.

In a way this is a picture of life without faith.

Flying upside down without even realizing it always ends in a deadly crash landing.

“Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent ---- and instead flew straight into the ground --- crashed and died. She was completely unaware that she had been flying upside down.”

Without God in our lives --- it al ends with a sudden and fatal crash landing.

And it is only the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that can turn us around and get us flying right side up --- get us flying in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Without Jesus ---- without God ---- without the Holy Spirit in our lives ----- we are only ever destined to a crash landing that ends in sudden and eternal death.

When we accept the words of John 1 verse 4 --- “Life was in Him --- Jesus -- -- life that made sense of human existence.”

Jesus is the only way we can ever make sense of human existence.

When we accept these words --- when we accept the truth and reality of the Christ event ---- the only event that actually makes sense of human existence ----- suddenly we find ourselves flying right side up again.

Until then nothing in this world makes any sense.

The workers in Matthew's Gospel today don't understand the grace of God -- they don't understand the nature of the Kingdom of God --- they are functioning from a strictly worldly view.

They are flying upside down.

To them God's grace ---- paying everyone the same whether they worked part of the day or the whole day ----- seems all upside down and backwards.

In fact they are angered by God's grace --- they are upset with how the kingdom of heaven works.

At the end of the day when they get paid this what they say ----- picking it up at verse 11 from Matthew's gospel today ---

“When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’”

The landowner's payment methodology seems to them ---- out of kilter ---- upside down and backwards --- they should get more --- they should get way more --- and they grumble when they don't.

The workers have a skewed concept of the kingdom of God --- and are outraged with the landowner.

After all isn't it obvious --- “He's out of his mind this landowner ----- he's all upside down and backwards isn't he?”

“How can he pay us all the same?”

I've worked harder and longer than they have --- I worked through the heat of the day in the roughest conditions --- and they well they only showed up for the last hour or so --- this isn't fair --- I ought to get more?"

If they're paid by the hour --- maybe they've got a point ---- aren't those who worked a full day due more than those who only worked part of a day -- - that's just simple math isn't it.

But that's just it this isn't a parable about mathematics --- it's a parable about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus doesn't begin the story saying --- "Mathematics works this way..." --- and He doesn't begin the passage saying "The world works this way..." --- instead He begins saying "The kingdom of heaven is like " --- "The kingdom of heaven works this way..."

Jesus was forever trying to get people --- to see that the kingdom of God was different from everything anything else they had ever seen or experienced.

C.S. Lewis one of the great Christian writers in the 20th Century said this --- "Our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and then trying to carry it out.

Rather --- he said ---- the real Son of God is at our side.

He is beginning to turn us into the same kind thing as Himself.

He is beginning ---- so to speak --- to "inject" His kind of life and thought --- His very life into us --- He is beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man.

And further he said --- "The part of us that doesn't like being changed is the part that is still tin."

"The part of us that doesn't like being changed is the part that is still tin." --- we spend far too much of our lives in the vertical world of matter --- and far too less of our lives in the horizontal world of the Holy Spirit.

If we live according to the ways of this world --- he or she who works harder or longer ought to get more --- like the workers in the Gospel today --- if we live thinking this way --- work and reward --- cheques and balances--- earn and deserve --- we will only ever remain tin soldiers --- living in the world of matter ----- the physical world ---- and never come truly alive in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God.

As Lewis says --- as our passage demonstrates ---- the Kingdom of God isn't at all about --- cheques and balances --- earn and deserve ----- work and reward --- tin soldiers ---- the horizontal world of matter and physicality.

Rather the kingdom of God is all about grace --- divine grace --- where work and reward --- cheques and balances --- and get what you deserve goes right out the window.

Dallas Willard in his book the Divine Conspiracy --- writes ---- “To gain deeper understanding of our eternal kind of life in God’s present kingdom --- we must be sure to understand what kingdom is.”

“To gain deeper understanding of our eternal kind of life in God’s present kingdom --- we must be sure to understand what kingdom is.”

And then he goes on to say --- “Every last one of us has a “kingdom” ---- or “queendom” ---- or a “government” ----- a realm that is all our own ---- where our choice determines what happens.

Here is a truth that reaches into the deepest part of what it means to be a person.”

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Here is a truth that reaches into the deepest part of what it means to be a person.”

And there is a lot of truth to this.

We are free to make choices --- our choices affect --- determine what happens to some degree ----- God made us this way.

And as John Calvin said --- “Everyone flatters himself --- and carries a kingdom in his breast.”

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Which --- according to Calvin --- is to say --- “there is nobody who does not imagine that he is really better than the others.”

Harsh words --- almost as harsh as scripture but not really so.

In a certain sense God put us in this kingdom ---- earth --- and said we are better than the others --- better than the animals and the trees ---- and we are to have dominion over them ---- we are to have stewardship over them.

That's the kingdom we carry in our breast --- that as human beings we are at the top of the food chain --- we are most important here on earth --- with everything else --- animals plants ---- and so on --- below us --- under us --- subject to our decisions.

And so we are responsible before God for our kingdom --- we are responsible before God for life on earth.

And this comes to us in Genesis 1 verse 28-30 --- which reads this way -----

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground --- everything that has the breath of life in it --- I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.”

Yes we have dominion over the birds and animals and plants --- we have dominion over creation.

The problem is we go our own way ---- and subdue and rule and --- control void of any kind of faithful relationship with God.

God gave us the earth to “rule” over it in complete and total union with Him --- not on our own.

But we don't work with God --- instead most of the time we go our own way ---- we slide back into tin soldier mode --- flying upside down ----- where things are doled out according to what we deserve and what we earn --- cheques and balances mode --- if I'm good all will be well --- if I'm not so good things will be not so good.

Which is utter nonsense ---- the goodness in our lives has nothing to do with our actions --- it has everything to do with God and His actions.

The workers in Matthew 20 today ---- want to function from a place of ---- cheques and balances ---- those who do more should get more --- and those who do less should get less.

But the kingdom of heaven does not work this way ----- unlike pay at the end of the day ----- the kingdom of heaven has nothing to do with earning and deserving --- merit or worthiness of our own making.

This is tin soldier living ---- as opposed to alive in Christ --- infused with the Holy Spirit ---- kingdom of God living.

This is flying upside down kind of living --- destined to a crash landing --- ending in sudden and eternal death --- not kingdom of God living.

What we can do with unassisted strength is minute --- small tiny ---- pointless even.

What we can do all on our own in miniscule --- of no real or lasting worth at all.

What we can do acting with mechanical ---- and electrical ---- and atomic power --- well that is far greater now isn't it.

We've gotten more and more full of ourselves as we've invented --- discovered and created more.

More power --- more possibilities ---- mechanical power --- electrical power ---- atomic power ---- we're getting pretty good --- we're getting pretty powerful here all of a sudden aren't we.

But --- what we can do with these means --- electrical --- mechanical --- atomic power even ----- is still tiny tiny and minute --- miniscule.

But atomic power is huge you might say ----- Hiroshima ---- Nagasaki --- the atomic bomb --- is hugely powerful --- how can you say that was minute.

Simple --- because compared to what God can do it isn't even worthy of an honourable mention.

All of our power is like a tiny little thimble of power compared to the vast ocean of God's power and might and influence.

When we give ourselves over to Gods' power and God's way --- and join in with what God is already doing --- that is the kingdom of heaven that Jesus is peaking about in Matthew 20 today.

Us working with God --- and not just for God awaiting something in return -- awaiting payment in return according to how long and hard we have determined that we have worked.

Matthew 20 has nothing to do with how much of a reward we or anybody else should get at the end of the day ---- Matthew 20 is all about what the kingdom of heaven looks like ---- not the reward we get at the end of the day for our part in it.

The kingdom of heaven has nothing to do with ---- he or she who works the hardest gets the most.

The kingdom of God has nothing to do with --- he or she who works the longest gets the most.

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do

what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

The workers don't like the kingdom of God approach at all ---- they don't like the generous landowner approach at all --- they worked harder and longer --- they are better workers --- so they want more --- by golly they deserve more.

As Calvin said --- “Every last one of us has a “kingdom” ---- or “queendom” ---- or a “government” ----- a realm that is all our own ---- where our choice determines what happens.

And in that kingdom ----- in our way of measuring and evaluating things we usually come out ahead --- “there is nobody who does not imagine that he is really better than the others.”

I worked harder --- I'm better ---- I deserve more ---- that's how kingdom here on earth works.

Work hard --- get more.

Work longer --- get more.

Be smarter ---- get more.

Know more --- get more.

And then God comes along and mashes this all up --- burning it up like cheap kindling in a raging fire.

The kingdom of God s like --- a landowner who gave out just as he wanted to give it out --- regardless of how hard or long anyone worked.

We don't like that kind of landowner.

People want to get what they deserve --- what they think they deserve ---- what they've earned.

Look at the little hockey player from Toronto ----- Nylander --- he's not even playing now because he wants more money ---- and he's not the only

one ----- in this world we look around at what other people are getting paid -
 --- and measure what we think should get paid --- and if we don't get paid
 that we grumble.

We're just like the workers in Matthew 20 --- Nylander is just like the
 workers in Matthew 20 today --- and I'm not just picking on him --- there
 are others --- we've all likely done it at some point in our lives ---- based our
 worth on someone else's worth.

That's' how the world works --- and we seem to think it is O.k.

If they're getting paid that kind of money and I'm doing the same job at the
 same level ---- I'm just as good as they are --- then I ought to get paid what
 they are getting paid.

I ought to be rewarded as they are rewarded ---- but that is not how the
 kingdom of God works --- and we know this why --- we know this because
 Matthew 20 says so.

Thanksgiving isn't about thanking God for all He blesses us with.

Thanksgiving is all about thanking God for who He is.

And how when we act in union with Him --- when we give over to Him
 instead of thinking we know better ----- it's beautiful and true and good.

We are flying upside down until we let God take the reigns.

God takes the upside down backwards ways of this world and turns them
 faithful --- right side up again.

God reverses the order of things.

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call
 the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired
 and going on to the first.’” --- verse 8 from Matthew 20 today.

And then the last verse --- the same sentiment ---
 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

God --- the kingdom of God changes everything --- re-prioritizes absolutely everything in the total opposite direction of this world.

As C. S. Lewis said ---

“Our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and then trying to carry it out.

Rather --- he said ---- the real Son of God is at our side.

He is beginning to turn us into the same kind thing as Himself.

He is beginning ---- so to speak --- to “inject” His kind of life and thought --- His very life into us --- He is beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man.

And further he said --- “The part of us that doesn’t like being changed is the part that is still tin.”

When we give ourselves over to God’s ways ---- when we live into the kingdom of God ----- we aren’t just concerned or consumed with doing better --- being better --- pulling up our boot straps.

When we give ourselves over to God’s ways ---- when we live into the kingdom of God ----- we’re concerned with what God is already doing.

It’s already done --- it’s already over --- God wins --- Satan loses --- life in the presence of God eternally is ours --- it’s already done ---- and we have done nothing at all the make it this way --- God has done it all.

The workers aren’t the point of the story in Matthew 20 --- how much they worked --- how long they worked --- how hard they worked --- and don’t miss it --- right there in verse 12 it is there --- how hard they worked really mattered to them ---- verse 12 includes ----- “bearing the burden of the work and the heat of the day”

Who worked harder mattered to them.

But they aren’t the point of the story ----- the landowner is ---- God is --- the landowner’s grace is -- the kingdom of God is the point of the story.

The passage begins --- making it clear --- very clear this is a story about God and not people first and foremost ---- “For the kingdom of heaven is like...” the passage begins --- you can’t make it any clearer than that.

And the Bible itself begins the same way --- with God.

“In the beginning God” --- that’s how Genesis begins.

“In the beginning God”

We are so self centered --- as human beings we are so self centered that we always think it is about us.

When Jesus asks how the law is summed up --- the answer begins with God ----- we always begin --- everything we do ought to always begins with God.

Luke 10 verse 27 ---

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”

Thanksgiving isn’t so much about thanking God for all that He gives us ---- I denarii --- 2 denarii --- three denarii four.

Thanksgiving is all about thanking God for who He is.

The saving Christ on the cross.

The guiding Spirit --- blowing in and through our lives on a daily basis.

Proverbs 9 verse 10 reads ----

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”

And remember wisdom in the Bible doesn’t means smarts ---- wisdom in the Bible means right living --- wisdom in the Bible means faithful living --- wisdom in the Bible means living according to God’s will and not our own.

If we want to live right --- live faithfully --- if we want to thank God truly --- -- we must first begin with fearing and revering Him --- we must first begin by loving Him with all we’ve got.

And loving God first --- even before loving other human beings --- loving God first ----- is backwards to everything this world teaches us.

If we put being nice to someone else ahead of loving God we've failed in our faith.

It's God first --- and sometimes putting God first will hurt people precisely because they are not being put first.

Sometimes putting God first will hurt others --- this happened to Jesus over and over and over again ---- the Pharisees couldn't stand the fact that Jesus put God first and not them and their understanding of the scriptures and the Sabbath.

It's not other people's feelings first and then God --- it's God first.

Living out the kingdom of God will sometimes appear as though you have got things backwards ---- upside down.

First last ----- and last first.

I don't know if anybody here remembers the comic strip called Dennis the Menace.

But in one strip there is Dennis and his friend ---- and there is Mrs. Wilson.

And you may recall Dennis was always causing problems for Mr. Wilson --- breaking a window ----- damaging his property ---- interrupting his naps and so on.

Well one day Dennis and his friend are eating cookies --- fresh baked chocolate chip cookies that Mrs. Wilson had baked for them.

And Dennis' friend says ---- "I wonder what we did that was so good that Mrs. Wilson decided to bake cookies for us Dennis?"

And Dennis replies saying --- "Don't you see --- Mrs. Wilson didn't bake the cookies for us because we are good --- Mrs. Wilson baked the cookies for us because she is good."

“Mrs. Wilson didn’t bake the cookies for us because we are good --- Mrs. Wilson baked the cookies for us because she is good.”

And so it is with God.

God doesn’t love us because we are good --- God loves us because He is good.

God doesn’t love us for what we have done nor what we have not done.

And so this Thanksgiving let’s thank God for who He is ---- not just what He gives to us --- nice chocolate chip cookies ---- pumpkin pie --- turkey ---- whatever.

Don’t get me wrong ----- I’m looking forward to all of that too --- Thanksgiving dinner ---- but that’s not the point is it.

The point of thanksgiving dinner isn’t the food and it isn’t even family ---- it’s God.

Thanksgiving isn’t about giving thanks for what we get ----- Thanksgiving is about giving thanks for who He --- God is.

God takes the ways of this world and fixes them ---- He takes what is upside down and turns it right side up.

“Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent ---- and instead flew straight into the ground --- crashed and died. She was completely unaware that she had been flying upside down.”

That right there sums up the human plight --- without God --- without Jesus -- without the Holy Spirit of God.

Without God --- without Jesus ---- without the Holy Spirit --- we are flying upside down and headed for a sudden crash landing.

As Dallas Willard said ----- “God issues an invitation to us to come out of the darkness and live right side up in the light” --- and as he also said --- “this invitation makes no sense to so many.”

“God issues an invitation to us to come out of the darkness and live right side up in the light --- unfortunately this invitation makes no sense to so many.”

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” ---- God changes the order around completely --- and the truth is we mostly don’t like it.

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’”

And the response of the workers ---- “they began to grumble”.

We live in an upside down world much of the time.

“I wonder what we did that was so good that Mrs. Wilson decided to bake cookies for us Dennis?”

“Don’t you see --- Mrs. Wilson didn’t bake the cookies for us because we are good --- Mrs. Wilson baked the cookies for us because she is good.”

God doesn’t love us because we are good --- God loves us because He is good.

We are not paid --- rewarded --- awarded ----- according to how long or how hard we have worked.

We have what we have because of God’s goodness.

Our worth is not our own.

And so we give thanks to God for who He is.

Holy --- awesome ---- marvelous one ---
 Saving --- loving ---- gracious one ---
 merciful ---- awesome ---- splendid saving one.

In the words of Psalm 145 ---- our call to worship today

“Great are you Lord --- worthy of praise ---
We will speak of your splendor and majesty
Tell of the power of your awesome works
Celebrate your abundant goodness.”

Thanksgiving is all about God’s goodness.

Thanksgiving is all about who God is.

To do as Jesus would have us do ---- the kingdom of heaven begins with
loving and thanking God --- over and over and over again.

This Thanksgiving may we take a moment to thank God for who He is.

Great --- awesome --- wonderful --- majestic and splendid in all He does.

Amen.