

SERMON

JULY 20, 2011, The Rev Joseph Clark

THERE IS A SCENE IN MONTY PYTHON'S *LIFE OF BRIAN* IN WHICH A CROWD OF PEOPLE ARE GATHERED AROUND A LITTLE HILL ON WHICH JESUS STANDSWHO DID HE SAY THE BLESSED ARE? "" OF COURSE HE DOESN'T MEAN CHEESE MAKERS LITERALLY, HE MEANS ALL KINDS OF DAIRY WORKERS. "

I AM REMINDED OF THIS "BLESSED ARE THE CHEESE MAKERS" SOME IN THE CROWD COMPLAIN ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO HEAR. YOU CAN IMAGINE, SOMEONE IN THE CROWD ASKS : "WHAT DID HE SAY? A MAN TURNS AND ASKS A FRIEND. " WHAT DID HE SAY ABOUT THE SEEDS AND THE WEEDS? "HE SAID THE MASTER SOWED SOME SEEDS AND SOME PEOPLE WHO HEARD THE WORD BUT CARED MORE ABOUT THE WORLD AND WEALTH AND YIELDED NOTHINGBUT WHAT I MISSED IS WHAT IT GOT TO DO WITH YAHWAH AND THE LAW? ...JESUS FOLLOWERS HAD THE VERY SAME QUESTION. THAT'S WHY MATTHEW ADDED HIS INTERPRETATION TO THE STORY AND TURNS THE SOWER INTO THE MESSIAH AND THE FIELDS INTO THE WORLD....

I DOUBT THAT JESUS EVER INTENDED WHAT MATTHEW
ADDED. THEY TAKE THE STORY AND ADD GOD AND THEOLOGIZE
THE STORY.

ONLY THREE PARABLES APPEAR IN MARK MATTHEW AND
LUKE.ALSO INCLUDED IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS. , THE OTHER
TWO ARE THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE TENANT WORKERS IN THE
VINEYARD. (THOMAS IS A COLLECTION OF 122 OF JESUS' SAYINGS.)

- THE PEOPLE ON THE BEACH ARE WAITING FOR THE REST OF THE
STORY BUT JESUS DIDN'T ADD ANYTHING. HE LET PEOPLE MAKE UP
THEIR OWN MINDS ABOUT WHAT HE SAID. . BUT LIKE US, THEY
WANT THE RELIGIOUS MEANING. AND WANT JESUS TO TELL THEM
WHAT TO BELIEVE OR HOW TO WORSHIP , AND DO BUSINESS AND
BEHAVE. .

WE ALL WANT THAT. WE WANT TO BE GIVEN THE ANSWER TO THE
MEANING OF LIFE. I THINK IT IS ONE OF THE GREATEST
TEMPTATIONS TO GIVE SOMEONE ELSE YOUR ANSWERS. THE
RESULT IS OUR CHILDREN END UP LIVING SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE AND
NOT THEIR OWN.

--- LET ME COME AT THIS A DIFFERENT WAY.

STEVE MARTIN, THE COMIC ACTOR, TELLS IN HIS BOOK, *BORN STANDING UP* - "WHAT BOTHERED ME ABOUT THIS WAS THAT A JOKE HAD BEEN TOLD AND THE LAUGHTER WAS LIKE APPLAUSE AT THE END OF A SONG. ""

WHAT MARTIN DID WAS TO FORM A NEW COMIC ROUTINE. HE ASKS " WHAT IF THERE WERE NO PUNCH LINES? WHAT IF THE AUDIENCE HAD TO PICK THEIR OWN PLACE TO LAUGH. THIS TYPE OF LAUGHTER SEEMED STRONGER TO ME, AS THEY WOULD BE LAUGHING AT SOMETHING THEY CHOSE, RATHER THAN BEING TOLD EXACTLY WHEN TO LAUGH."

THAT THESE STORIES OF JESUS INVITE **YOU** TO PROVIDE A PUNCH LINE; NOT TO MAKE US FEEL GOOD GO BACK TO THE OLD GRIND FOR ONE MORE WEEK.

I THINK WHAT JESUS DID WAS TO ASK THE LISTENER TO THINK, PONDER, COGITATE, BE DISTURBED, CHALLENGED AND ENCOURAGED TO REALLY WORK AT HOW THIS TALE MIRRORS YOUR OWN LIFE. DISTURB US AND LET US CHEW AND STEW.

I THINK THAT JESUS MUST HAVE BEEN AN OFFENCE TO PEOPLE ON THAT BEACH MUCH AS HE CAN BE TO MANY OF US SINCE THEN BECAUSE HE DIDN'T PROVIDE A FORMULA FOR LIFE'S MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS, HE DIDN'T GIVE A PAT ANSWER ABOUT CONTROLLING GOD AND SPROUTING ALL THE SEEDS.

I DON'T THINK JESUS IS CALLING THE ROCKS BAD OR THE SEEDS THAT FELL IN THE PATH WRONG OR THAT WE'RE HAVING HA HARD TIME BECAUSE OF ANY LACK OF VIRTUOUS LIVING OR PAST SINS.

JESUS IS NOT EQUATING REWARDS WITH BEING GOOD AND SUCCESS WITH PRAYING HARD, GIVING A TITHE TO THE CHURCH OR WORSHIPING PROPERLY. OR THAT IF WE JUST LOST WEIGHT, STOPPED SMOKING, EXERCISED MORE, BE FAITHFUL IN OUR MARRIAGE AND NICE TO THE POOR, WE'LL HAVE GOD'S EVERLASTING LIGHT SHINE UPON US.

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING TO US TODAY AS WELL AS THOSE ON THE BEACH IN HIS TIME IS THAT THIS IS YOUR LIFE AND IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL, YOU WILL EMBRACE ALL OF IT...AND OWN ALL OF IT, WITH TEARS OF JOY AS WELL AS TEARS OF SORROW.

KATE BRAESTRUP IS A CHAPLAIN FOR THE STATE OF MAINE WARDEN SERVICE. SHE WRITES IN HER BOOK, *HERE, IF YOU NEED ME*, ABOUT WHEN HER BROTHER ASKED HER IF SHE BELIEVED IN GOD. SHE WROTE HIM: "***IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW EDUCATED, MONEYED, OR SMART YOU ARE: WHEN YOUR CHILD'S FOOTPRINTS END AT THE RIVER'S EDGE, WHEN THE ONE YOU LOVE HAS GONE INTO THE WOODS WITH A BLEAK OUTLOOK AND A LOADED GUN, WHEN THE CHAPLAIN IS WALKING TOWARD YOU WITH BAD NEWS IN HER MOUTH...YOUR LIFE WILL SWING SUDDENLY AND CRUELLY IN A NEW DIRECTION WITH BREATHTAKING SPEED, AND IF YOU ARE REALLY WISE --- AND IT'S SURPRISING AND WONDROUS HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE THIS WISDOM IN THEM --- YOU WILL KNOW ENOUGH TO LOOK AROUND FOR LOVE. IT WILL BE THERE, STANDING RIGHT ON THE HINGE, HOLDING OUT ITS ARMS TO YOU. IF YOU ARE WISE, WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU WILL LET GO, FALL AGAINST THAT LOVE, AND BE HELD.***"

THIS STORY TODAY IN THE GOSPEL IS A REMINDER THAT WHEN THINGS FALL APART AND THE MARRIAGE IS OVER OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE HAS DIED AND WHAT MATTERS MOST GETS BROKEN THAT

JESUS IS NOT ABOUT UNDERSTANDING OR FIXING IT OR FOR SOME DARK AND INCOMPENSABLE WAY GOD IS DOING THIS TO US FOR OUR OWN GOOD.

NO, WHEN THINGS FALL APART, YOU CAN DO NO BETTER AND WILL KNOW ENOUGH TO LOOK AROUND FOR LOVE AND THOSE PEOPLE WHO REALLY CARE. THEY WILL BE THERE, STANDING RIGHT AT THE HINGE OF YOUR LIFE, HOLDING OUT THEIR ARMS TO YOU. WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU WILL LET GO OF EXPLANATIONS AND FALL AGAINST THAT LOVE AND BE HELD.

THAT WISDOM AS THAT IS INSIDE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US...JESUS BELIEVED IN YOU AND ME. THE ISSUE IS, NO MATTER WHERE THE SEED GETS SOWN AND WHATEVER HAPPENS IN THE PATH, OUR LIFE IS ABOUT THE COURAGE TO LET GO AND THE FAITH TO FALL, AND ULTIMATELY , HELD BY A LOVE THAT FINALLY, HEALS. AMEN