

Sermon – Proper 20 – Yr C
Saint Barnabas Church, Bainbridge Island, Washington
September 18, 2016

Luke gives us yet another image for God – a rich man who has hired someone to manage his property

The manager is loaning money to the small farmers, perhaps to purchase seeds or young trees or to hire more workers

The Hebrew Scriptures teach that it is against God's will to charge interest on money that is loaned

I wonder if that is what the manager did – I wonder if for every \$100 he gave to the small farmers he charged 10% interest

That way, he could write up the loan or gift as a \$110 gift but only give the borrower \$100 – there you go! No interest is charged

But the rich man has heard rumors about his manager and calls him to come in for a meeting

Panic! Quickly, the manager re-writes the agreements, restoring his favor and good relationships among his peers

And the owner commends the shrew, dishonest manager

What is the Gospel of Luke trying to tell us when he says “make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

Could our God be a god of sarcastic humor? Is the god of surprises telling a very bad joke? The obvious explication doesn't seem congruent with the values in rest of gospel.

Bishop Rickel sent us material to explain those last sentences, but I couldn't make sense of the explanation. I admit to thinking, to puzzling and pondering.

What if.....

This story is a continuation of the preceding stories about inclusion, about love preceding repentance and about judgment meeting forgiveness – you know, the good Samaritan, the loving father and his prodigal son, the search for the lost sheep and lost coin.

What if.....

This is a story about a kingly God who has dominion over everyone who lives in the kingdom, both shrewd children of this age and children of the light?

What if

This is about a benevolent god, who sees all creation making slow and uneven progress toward a life of loving our neighbors as ourselves? Toward living in union with our God – the heavenly kingdom, so to speak

My thoughts are shaped by the spiritual reading I have chosen for September – the life and writings of Julian of Norwich, a self-taught theologian proclaimed a doctor of the church for the wisdom and integrity of her writings

Julian of Norwich

Born 1342, Norwich, 2nd largest city in England

Center of wool trade with the continent

Very difficult times

Three plagues – 2/3 of the population died, including her children

War with France – taxes to pay for the war

Julian herself became very ill, near death, visions

In these visions or “showings,” Christ showed his absolute assurance that God’s persisting love for humans will triumph over all evil, that “all shall be well.”

How could this be she wondered for all she saw was much sin and suffering in the world Julian prayed, thought, went to Mass, borrowed books from the Franciscans, and met with a Franciscan priest who became her spiritual director

Self-taught to read and write, Julian wrote about her visions – not in the French language of the educated but in the rough English spoken by the common people: a first

In her 40’s she received permission to live as an anchorite – apart, in prayer

Little bee hive shaped addition to her local church, St. Julian

Three windows,

one into the church so she could receive communion

one to her servant for food and hygiene and

one covered by a curtain so she could listen to the prayer requests and give gentle guidance to people who came to speak with her

Julian herself wondered who or what is God? What does it mean to be human? What is evil? Sin? How are we redeemed by God?

Reflecting on Jesus’ showings, her readings, and the teachings of her Franciscan priest, she wrote a philosophical theology

It begins with God.

God is the true or essence and being of all that is created:

Scripture reveals God creates all, breathes into creation the breath of the Holy Spirit and calls it “good.”

All is good because God is good; Love is God’s true nature

Nothing has being except through participation in the being of God

Because all that IS manifests the being of God, all that IS is good in its true nature.

Evil has no true nature

Evil has no essence or essential reality. Yet evil surely exists.

The human, says Julian, is differentiated into essence and existence

The essence of a human being is the image of God

Our goodness and love is like a poor mirror, a rough picture of God

The human essence is completely good, by nature united to God’s being

The human existence is another story

As existence, humans have autonomy and freedom – apart from God,

Our existence is an end in itself

Humans “fall” into alienation from God and from themselves

Human existence becomes split from its essence or true nature which is in union with God

This reminds us of the end of Luke’s Gospel for today: “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.” – we usually “fall” or split from our true nature a very little at a time

This fall into sin (alienation or separation) is manifest in woundedness

Experience distress of mind and body

Sin is nothing in itself but is felt in human life as pain – pains of mental anguish, self blame, shame, and of physical suffering of the mortal body

Our distress leads us to forget our true nobility as God's image, to forget God's continuing love for us and to slide into a despairing sense of hopelessness and worthlessness

God is not angry with us and does not blame us for our fall into sin.

These negative emotions are our own projections onto God

We are captured by our fall state and see only our own dilemmas and fail to recognize God continues to love us and to wish us only good.

God permitted and continues to permit humans to fall into sin because God allows human freedom

In order for humans to attain their full spiritual maturity in union with God, they also have to experience what it means to fall out of that union into the distressful condition of separation from God.

From the beginning God intended to provide the remedy.

Dame Wisdom, the Creative Word, from whom we have our spiritual *essence*, took on our bodily *existence* and bore all its woes in the crucifixion.

God provides the means by which we can heal our division, drawing our existence back into union with our essence, our souls, anticipating the day when this union will be complete and every form of mortality and distress will cease

Christ, as creator of our essence and existence, takes on the distresses of our fallen bodily conditions – but without sin (separation from God).

We are never really separated from God, nor do we ever lose our true nature as God's created image.

We have become blind and have forgotten who we are, but we have not ceased to be, in our true essence, the noble manifestation of God's loving goodness.

One of the favorite showings Julian revealed to Christians was her vision of the hazelnut. She wrote: God "showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and I thought, 'What can this be?' And answer came, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled that it could last, for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small. And the answer came into my mind, 'It lasts and ever shall because God loves it.' And all things have being through the love of God.

Julian went on to say, "In this little thing, I saw three truths. The first is that God made it. The second is that God loves it. The third is that looks after it."

God like both a lowly shepherd and a wealthy king who loves us and enjoys us and wills that we love him and enjoy him, and firmly trust him; and thus, all shall be well.