

**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 20C****SEPTEMBER 19, 2010**

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

St. Matthew's Church

Psalm 79:1-9

Chesterfield, VA

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Ruth Partlow

Luke 16:1-13

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.” (Luke 16:10) FRED

CRADDOCK, UNITED METHODIST MINISTER, RETIRED HOMILETICS (PREACHING)

PROFESSOR – AND A MARVELOUS PREACHER/STORY TELLER WROTE OF THIS VERSE

*“Most of us will not this week christen a ship, write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with a queen, convert a nation, or be burned at the stake. More likely the week will present no more than a chance to give a cup of water, write a note, visit a nursing home, vote for county commissioner, teach a Sunday school class, share a meal, tell a child a story, go to choir practice, and feed the neighbor’s cat.”* “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.” (Luke 16:10)

[Luke: Interpretation (Louisville, Westminster, John Knox, 1990) 192]

FRIDAY, I SPENT SOME TIME IN THE GARAGE WATCHING A HUMMINGBIRD. HE HAD FLOWN INTO THE GARAGE AND COULD NOT FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET OUT. AS HUMMINGBIRDS DO, HE FLEW AND FLEW VERY RAPIDLY – BUT ALWAYS UP NEAR THE CEILING. SOMETIMES HE WOULD LAND ON THE RED BRICK WALL AND MOVE UP AND DOWN ON IT. OR HE WOULD SIT ON AN EMPTY BOX HIGH UP ON A TOP SHELF. HE JUST COULDN’T SEE THE OPEN GARAGE DOOR. MOLLY, THE DOG, AND I WATCHED HIM. WE STOOD VERY STILL IN THE DOOR INTO THE HOUSE. AFTER WATCHING HIM I WONDERED – “WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP HIM LEAVE THE GARAGE?”

I KNEW I CERTAINLY COULDN’T BEGIN TO CATCH HIM WITH MY HANDS.

I DID NOT HAVE A BUTTERFLY NET; THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A POSSIBILITY IF I HAD HAD ONE!

I SUSPECTED TRYING TO SHOO HIM OUT WITH A BROOM WOULD FRIGHTEN HIM AND JUST MAKE HIM HUNKER DOWN ON ONE OF THE MANY HIGH PERCHES (IE BOXES AND STUFF) IN THE GARAGE.

I THOUGHT AND THOUGHT. “AH HA! I’LL GET ONE OF THE HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS ON THE DECK AND HANG IT ON THE GARAGE DOOR”. ACTUALLY I HUNG IT ON THE ELECTRIC CORD THAT PLUGS THE DOOR MECHANISM INTO THE CEILING. IT MADE A PERFECT LOOP HANGING A LITTLE BELOW THE MECHANISM.

THE HUMMINGBIRD BUZZED AROUND AND FINALLY FOUND THE FEEDER. HE SAT ON IT; HE DRANK FROM IT – BUT HE DIDN’T FLY OUT. THEN FLEW UP TO A BOX HIGH ON A SHELF AND SAT.

SO I THOUGHT, “I’LL GET A SECOND FEEDER FROM THE DECK.” (WE HAVE 4). I SUSPENDED THIS ONE FROM A SPOT ON THE GARAGE DOOR – CLOSER TO THE OUTSIDE. AFTER SITTING ON THE FIRST FEEDER, HE FOUND THE SECOND ONE. ENJOYED IT A WHILE – THEN FLEW BACK TO A HIGH PERCH IN THE GARAGE. HE FLEW ALL AROUND THE CEILING BUT NEVER LOW ENOUGH TO SEE THE OPENING.

NEXT, I DECIDED TO BACK MY CAR OUT IN HOPES HE WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THE OPENING MORE CLEARLY. NO LUCK. HE JUST KEPT FLYING HIGH.

I LOOKED AROUND FOR SOMETHING THAT RESEMBLED A FLOWER SINCE . MOST OF THE FLOWERS THAT ATTRACT HIM ARE GONE. I SPOTTED A COLORFUL UMBRELLA – LIKE THE RAINBOW. FIRST I SET IT ON THE GROUND AT THE GARAGE ENTRANCE. THEN I MOVED IT TO A CONTAINER SO IT WOULD STAND UP LIKE A FLOWER. STILL – NO LUCK! THE HUMMING BIRD KEPT FLYING TOO HIGH

WHAT COULD I DO TO ENTICE HIM TO FLY OUT? “AH HA”, I THOUGHT. “I WILL GET A COAT HANGER, BEND IT AND SUSPEND THE FIRST FEEDER FROM IT. MAYBE HE WILL FIND THE WAY OUT.” NO LUCK! HE FLEW AND DRANK FROM IT BUT THEN HEADED BACK UP TO THE CEILING OF THE GARAGE AND FLEW AROUND.

I THOUGHT, “MAYBE I SHOULD FIND ANOTHER COAT HANGER, DO THE SAME THING AND LOWER THE SECOND FEEDER.” SO I DID. HE FLEW TO THE FIRST ONE. AND THEN HE WENT TO THE SECOND ONE. BUT HE FLEW AROUND UP HIGH ONCE

MORE. THEN HE WENT TO THE FIRST FEEDER, AND FINALLY TO THE SECOND FEEDER. STANDING IN DOORWAY AT THE REAR OF THE GARAGE, I STEPPED OUT INTO THE GARAGE, STARTLING HIM. HE FLEW OUT!! “HOORAY. HE’S FREE AT LAST!”

PERHAPS I WAS DOING ONE OF THOSE SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS TO ANOTHER – IN THIS CASE – ONE OF GOD’S TINY CREATURES – A HUMMINGBIRD.

*“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.”* (Luke 16:10)

WE ARE CALLED – TO BE FAITHFUL IN EVERYDAY THINGS. MOST OF US WILL NEVER DO THE GREAT HEROIC THING; IT IS IN BEING FAITHFUL IN THE SMALL WAYS THAT WE ARE FAITHFUL IN MUCH.

BEING FAITHFUL IN LITTLE THINGS IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY. IT’S A DAILY ATTITUDE AND DECISION. WE’RE ALL AT DIFFERENT POINTS ON THE ROAD. HOW WE TRAVEL IS UP TO US. WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE FAITHFUL, HONEST, RESPONSIBLE, CARING OR WE DO NOT. IT’S A CHOICE, AN ATTITUDE.

JESUS TOLD THE STORY OF THE DISHONEST MANAGER. THE MANAGER WAS DOING A LOUSY JOB. WE DON’T KNOW WHETHER HE WAS STEALING, PLAYING AROUND, WASTING TIME ON HIS COMPUTER, WHO KNOWS. THE UPSHOT. HE WASN’T DOING THE JOB. HE WAS FIRED!

INSTEAD OF WRINGING HIS HANDS, OR GETTING ANGRY THE MANAGER THOUGHT, “WHAT SHOULD I DO? I AM NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO DIG DITCHES FOR A LIVING AND I CERTAINLY CAN’T SIT AT THE CITY GATE AND BEG.”

CLEVERLY – HE DEvised A SHREWD PLAN – TO GIVE A SUBSTANTIAL DISCOUNT ON WHAT THEY OWED TO EACH OF THE MEN IN INDEBTED TO HIS MASTER. HE HOPED THEN, THAT SHOULD HIS JOBLESSNESS CREATE A DESPERATE NEED , THEY WOULD FEEL KINDLY TOWARD HIM, EVEN OBLIGATED – MAYBE BECOME HIS FRIEND AND OPEN THEIR HOMES TO HIM. IN AN ODD WAY, IN

FORGIVING THE MEN A PORTION OF THEIR DEBT, HE WAS ACTUALLY BEING FAITHFUL IN A LITTLE – HELPING THE DEBTORS.

IT WAS, AS JESUS SAID, SHREWD. HE DIDN'T SAY IT WAS RIGHT. OUR TRANSLATION DESCRIBES HIM AS A *DISHONEST* MANAGER. THE ACTUAL GREEK WORD *adikia* MEANS *UNRIGHTEOUS* – THAT IS, NOT GOD CENTERED, BUT WORLDLY. THE MANAGER WAS SHREWD AND CLEVER. HE WAS FAITHFUL IN SOME SMALL ACTIONS THAT WOULD PAY GREAT DIVIDENDS LATER.

JESUS WANTED HIS DISCIPLES TO BE SHREWD IN THE SAME WAY AS THEY PROCLAIMED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM – NOT IN A DISHONEST OR UNRIGHTEOUS WAY BUT BY BEING “WISE AS SERPENTS AND GENTLE AS DOVES.” (Matt. 10:16) HE WANTED THEM TO BE A BLESSING OTHERS, TO SHARE THEIR FAITH IN AN EFFECTIVE AND INTELLIGENT WAY THAT GLORIFIED GOD. HE WANTED THEM TO HAVE LIFE ABUNDANT THAT ONLY COMES FROM HAVING GOD IN THE CENTER OF THEIR LIVES.

LIKE THE DISCIPLES WE TOO ARE CALLED TO LIVE THE ABUNDANT LIFE. WE SIMPLY HAVE TO BE WISE ENOUGH TO JOURNEY WITH GOD IN CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES. ABUNDANT LIVING IS NOT ABOUT GETTING MORE STUFF OR THINGS OR BEING AN IMPASSIONED CONSUMER. IN THE END, THOSE THINGS DON'T BRING THE ABUNDANCE AND THE PEACE. THE ABUNDANT LIFE COMES ONLY AS WE PLACE JESUS AT THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES. ABUNDANCE ISN'T ABOUT MONEY OR MAMMON. AS EUGENE PETERSON WRITES IN *THE MESSAGE* “YOU CAN'T SERVE GOD AND THE BANK.” (*THE MESSAGE BY Eugene Peterson. Luke 16:13*)

THE KINGDOM IS WITHIN US. PEOPLE SEARCH THE WORLD OVER TRYING TO FILL THE EMPTINESS THAT IS WITHIN – AS BLAISE PASCAL CALLED IT, “THE GOD SHAPED VACUUM”. WHEN WE FILL IT WITH GOD, ABUNDANCE, PEACE, JOY WILL COME.

WHAT MIGHT THIS PARABLE BE CALLING US AT ST. MATTHEW'S TO DO, TO BE? WE ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS. WE TOO WALK WITH HIM. HE CALLS US FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE. AND, WE NEED TO WRESTLE AND PONDER QUESTIONS LIKE

- WHO WILL BE OUR NEXT RECTOR? WHAT WILL HE OR SHE BE LIKE?
- DO WE READILY INVITE OTHERS INTO OUR COMMUNITY – FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS WHO ARE NOT GOING TO CHURCH ANYWHERE OR WHO ARE LOOKING?
- HOW DO WE WELCOME YOUNG CHILDREN INTO OUR MIDST?
- HOW DO WE WELCOME VISITORS AND NEW PEOPLE INTO OUR COMMUNITY?
- IS OUR SPACE ADEQUATE? DOES GROWTH MEAN EXPANDING OUR SPACE?
- ARE WE TOO COMFORTABLE WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW? ARE WE AFRAID OF CHANGE, OF NEW POSSIBILITIES?
- ARE WE WILLING TO SACRIFICE OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL DESIRES AND WANTS FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS PARISH? IT IS AFTER ALL GOD'S WORK.

ARE WE WILLING TO TRUST IN GOD'S ABUNDANCE AND OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD'S WILL AND GUIDANCE? WILL WE TAKE OUR TIME, TALENT AND TREASURE AND CONSECRATE IT TO THIS PARISH? MIGHT WE BE WILLING TO WORK TOWARD A TITHE OF OUR INCOME – TO SAY "YES" TO THE BIBLICAL TITHE OF 10% OF ONE'S INCOME? MOST OF US AREN'T ANYWHERE NEAR THAT LEVEL, BUT WE CAN BEGIN TO WORK SLOWLY TOWARD THE GOAL OF A BIBLICAL TITHE.

*"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."*

IT'S A RISK. IT'S A CHALLENGE. BUT YOU AND I KNOW THAT GOD IN CHRIST HAS TRULY GUIDED THIS PARISH THROUGH 15 YEARS OF IT'S LIFE, THROUGH DESERT TIMES AND GLORIOUS TIMES. I PRAY EACH OF US WILL BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD'S GIFTS BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND AS IT RELATES TO ST. MATTHEW'S.

*"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."* (Matt. 16:10)