

SEVEN DAYS AND COUNTING: TEACHING

Luke 20:1-19

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The Lord is our light and our salvation. This is the prayer of our heart and there is only one thing that we seek - that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all of our days, to gaze upon the beauty of the lord and to seek him in his temple. For when there is trouble, he will keep us safe in his dwelling place and he will hide us in the shelter of his love - setting us high upon a rock. Hear our voice when we call out to you O God, be merciful to us. My heart is saying to you “seek his face! Your face, Lord, I will seek”. (Psalm 27 paraphrased)

Speak to us your word of truth, O God that we might be made new in your creation. Amen.

Come back with me all the way to 1989. It was June of that year when I was graduating from North Allegheny High School and my sister Barb had returned home to celebrate with our family.

During her visit, some strange things began to happen. She was having trouble with her balance, she noticed that she was having some slurred speech and a note that she left me one afternoon was not the usual handwriting of my beloved sister.

She went to our family doctor here and he assured her that it was not a tumor - but that she would need to go for further testing when she went back to her home in Florida.

After a battery of tests and some further visits with a neurologist - my sister barb was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the age of 24. It was from that point that our family began a journey of discovery of the challenges and realities of a diagnosis that would alter my sisters life.

Relapsing and remitting MS means that her body goes through ups and downs like a roller coaster ride. The ups are her plateaus and the downs are referred to as exacerbations. Sometimes the downs are not so bad, but slowly the highs are not as high as they used to be and my sister has been on a slow physical coast to where she is today.

Fast forward to about 2002. One day my mother was walking down the hallway in her home and she tripped on something - she tore her rotator cuff which led to a subsequent repair and rehabilitation.

My mother had always been a clumsy person - at least that's what we always said. She didn't do well walking and chewing gum - bifocals always posed a challenge when she would walk down a sidewalk. Tree roots and broken sidewalks where like a runners hurdle for my mom. So - tripping over carpet in a hallway was just par for the course.

But her doctor wanted to know why her foot was dropping and what caused her to fall and hurt her shoulder, so she was sent to an orthopedist. The orthopedic doctor sent her to a specialist - maybe it was her sciatica. Nope - nothing there - off she went to a neurologist.

After months of appointments and tests - the results came in. My mother had Multiple Sclerosis.

This may sound a bit strange - but the diagnosis didn't really rattle us all that much. In fact - it was quite a relief to finally put a name with the face. My mother was facing something, we just didn't know what. The future, while a challenge, was now a little more known. The news was not something that we didn't want to hear.

You see - when you hear the truth - our journey becomes just that much easier to handle. When you know the way or the destination - how you get there becomes that much easier. It leads to a full understanding of what to face, the challenges that lie ahead and what it is that you need to do to get yourself, not only in the right frame of mind, but in the right place spiritually.

We could do this!

So we are now into our third week in our series entitled "Seven Days and Counting" and we are now well into our week that changed our lives. Jesus has entered the city. He's been in and out of the city. He went to the temple and upset a few people. Things are beginning to change. The tempers are starting to flare just a little bit.

Last week, I told you that Monday really was a pivotal moment for Jesus and this movement. I'm not a literary scholar or English major, but I think that some would say that at this point in the story the tension is beginning to rise. We've moved well along in our story from the 19th chapter and we have been preparing ourselves for Jesus teaching. People are eager to hear the Good News.

But not everyone.

Today we come to this beautiful story of Jesus teaching in the temple. Last week I told you that Jesus cleared it all out for us to be ready and receptive for his teaching - and now the time has come.

The scripture says that on that day, Jesus was teaching in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news. But those in the know, those who thought they were in the know, those who thought they knew better were not so pleased.

And so they came up to him and asked him about his authority. Who told you to do this, where did you go to school, who are your teachers. Can we see your curriculum vitae?

You see - those that came up to him were a part of the ruling class - the group of people who found themselves in the place of ensuring all the checks and balances of the law were in order.

You had the priests who were divided into 24 groups and they served on rotating basis in the temple. You had their bosses, the chief priests who were assigned other duties. You had the scribes who were trained in the law and were there to see that you followed the law and you had the elders who were the leading families in Jerusalem. They were all part of the group that was known as the Sanhedrin. They were the guardians of the Jewish Tradition.

And so it's this group that comes up to Jesus and asks - by what authority do you teach.. They were essentially questioning everything about Jesus from the time of his rise in ministry to now. They had been questioning his practices of healing and teaching on the Sabbath and they were especially enraged now for this brash and confrontational entrance into the city - not to mention that display in the temple yesterday.

You see - authority and power were clear to them. They inherited it. But his authority was unknown to them. In their tradition - who your mentors were and who taught you was a part of what they called "authority." Your teacher and his teacher before him was part of the authority.

They were challenging not only his authority, but his entire message.

And so it is that Jesus in his answer, metaphorically turns the tables on them again. And asks them a question in return. You can imagine that this only makes them angrier.

By not answering them - it brings dishonor to them, brings shame and they begin to lose their mind. But wait - it just gets even more interesting.

Because as the people are gathering around - Jesus tells a story - a great story about a vineyard owner. It's a parable and you know that parables are told to make a point. They know it - ok - maybe they don't. But Jesus is beginning to make a point.

But I will tell you who does begin to recognize it - the chief priests, the elders and the scribes - because it's a story that they recognized and one that they seem to think they've heard before.

I love this because Jesus is remembering some places in the verses of scripture from the prophets that had come before. You see there is this one story from the prophet Isaiah in the fifth chapter.

Write that down - Isaiah chapter five - in fact I'd invite you to go back and read that this week and flip back and forth with this story of the vineyard owner and the wicked tenants and this story of the Song of the Vineyard.

So Jesus is making connections and he tells people about a very gracious landowner who puts some tenants in charge of his vineyard. The practice of landowners of that day leasing back a portion of their land was a commonly held practice. It was a good relationship. It was based upon trust and an agreement - a covenant if you will.

Somewhere along the way - harvest to be specific - the owner sends one of his servants to get some of the harvest and the tenants renege on their end of the agreement and the covenant. They don't want to fulfill their end of the lease and so they run that servant out of town. The owner is

a bit confused - they had an agreement so he sent another and another and still they drive the servants away empty handed.

The owner thought to himself that he only had one choice left. The text this morning gives us a little soliloquy from the owner when he says, "What shall I do now?"

And so he sent his son.

And before I move away from this - here is a point that I don't want you to miss. Jesus says that the owner will send his son, whom he loves.

I don't want you to miss that one point because I think its an important one. His son whom he loves. Do you remember when Jesus was baptized? When the clouds opened up and the dove descended? Do you remember the voice of God proclaim - this is my son, whom I love. In him I am well pleased.

The owner sends his son. He loves him and the tenants know it. And the tenants were greedy and they knew that this was the heir to the owner - the son would inherit everything - so they killed him.

So pause there for a moment.

Jesus tells a familiar story about a vineyard owner - a story that brings back images of judgement and receptivity to a message. The Sanhedrin is standing around and it begins to hit them. These greedy and vengeful tenants are them.

And he looks at them and basically tells them what amounts to be a message that is not really well received. Their inheritance was slowly slipping through their fingers and this heir, this one who is teaching is starting to share that inheritance with other people whom they do not believe deserved it.

And the vineyard owner is gracious and the tenants are greedy - and for that - someone must die.

Then what is the meaning of this. Jesus says that the stone the builders rejected has become a cornerstone.

I love that image of a stone - because the stone is either one on which you can build you life - or one that can make you stumble.

As if in a simple gesture - Jesus is turning his attention away from those that seek to make people stumble and fall and offers and invitation to those that will listen to build their live on something different. It's an invitation to relationship and it's an invitation to receive an inheritance that not everyone wants to receive.

I can't help but want to move from this point to thinking about how I process this information and make it a part of my life - how I receive that inheritance, how I am blessed by that inheritance, and most of all how I share that inheritance.

This past week I had an opportunity to be a part of conversations about discipleship and about being in relationship. It was a powerful reminder about our need as a church to stop guarding ourselves and turning inward and a reminder that the only way that we will grow is to be in relationship with others.

Sometimes in the church we live in the seduction of trying to fix our problems rather than turning our lives to those God seeks. If you answer the call in our lives and graciously share the good news of Jesus Christ to others you will grow the church. But if you seek only to grow the church you will fail to make disciples.

You see - in our desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ - we empower and equip one another in small groups and it is in worship that we lead others to Christ and grow spiritually. But in this great circle of growth - the invitation into worship happens in small groups where we live life together and we invite people into conversation that leads to difficult conversations about life and eventually into discussions about Jesus and how he has become our cornerstone.

I don't know about all of you - but just because you go to church doesn't mean that you have it all figured out. The church doesn't just throw up a cloak of invisibility around you or a bubble of germ protection, but it does begin to teach us how to love and embrace one another through those challenges.

Meeting with others - even in a simple invitation to meet for coffee and just talk about life begins to engage. Those meetings lead to other opportunities and other times when you get to talk about your faith and how prayer has impacted your life and despite the fact that you've been through a rough patch - the church has been there along the way.

And oh by the way - my life is built under a cornerstone.

Getting away from social media is part of my fast this lent. What I am hoping to do is get away from that which we call social and do more that is social

I heard a great story that made me think about being in relationship and doing life with others this week. It said - "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men and women to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

Being in relationship with people is hard sometimes. But I think that sharing a message about the vast and endless sea, that sense of adventure is a great way of sharing your life with others. Sharing the story of how your life is different because of this inheritance that you've received and how your life is different because of it shares just how deeply Jesus loves and cares for you. And it's an invitation into that relationship.

When we are in relationship with the son of the vineyard owner - we are promised something great and that is his inheritance of his love. But the only problem is that in order for us to share in that inheritance, Jesus had to die.

But it is because of that death on the cross that our lives are so much different.

I don't know about you - but that is a message that I want to hear, and I'm even more glad that we get to share it.

Let's turn to our next steps this week.

Let's pray.