

Proper 21A, Saint John's Olney, 1 October 2017

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Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

S.D.G.

Yes, the Bible is a great book, and story telling at its best. I realize that I am not normal in this regard, but there are times when I read the assigned scripture for Morning Prayer and at the end I can't wait until the next day to see what happens. Yes, I probably already know what happens, but the suspense of not reading it is a challenge; it is like an end of season cliff-hanger that keeps you waiting for the next episode. It is great story telling, and so much more. Hear this proclaimed in our psalm:

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.*

In the verses that are missing today we hear of the Law and how:

*he commanded our ancestors  
to teach to their children;  
that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children,  
so that they should set their hope in God,  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;*

The stories and the law need to be passed along to each generation. Prior to the advent of the printing press this story telling was even more important; the Holy Scriptures were primarily shared through the telling of the stories. And as we built buildings specific for worship the stories of the Bible were also shared through art and stained glass. The windows of old cathedrals often depicted in intricate detail different Bible stories. This was a way to share the story with those who could not read but could see the images. The message that these images convey is important because it is often the message of Scripture that is being told. The windows are not only beautiful, but they are also educating an audience who could not pick up a Bible and read it. Images are valuable, and the message they convey can be priceless, and if we are not careful images can be damaging.

Jesus asks the chief priests and the elders what message the two sons in the parable conveyed, who did the will of his father. The question that was asked is important, 'who did the will of the father?', if he had asked 'who honored his father?' the response would have been different. Jesus saw the chief priests and the elders as honoring God with visible signs of worship; however they, like the second son, fell short on doing the will of God. When called to the vineyard the second son said 'I will go' and then the second son, like the chief priests and elders, never did the work that God called them to, they fell short on actions. The image that portrays their work is empty, and their worship is hollow.

The images of the Bible are wonderful and telling. And while the Bible itself is complete, the story of God's work in the world continues to be written every day in our lives. Those stories and the image of our own work is intended to be beautiful, intricate in its detail, and it is to be a story that is to be told to the generations that follow.

My grandfather, Henry, died at the age of 111. When he died my mother asked if there was anything that I wanted; his Bible and Prayer Book were

soon in my possession. I then learned a story from a priest who served the parish where my grandfather had attended for about 50 years. The parish had a book store, and late in his life my grandfather's caregivers would go to that bookstore every few years to buy a new Prayer Book because he had worn out the previous editions. Imagine the window that might be created to depict that story.

Imagine the window that might be created to show your own works, the works that the Father has called you to do. Will it be glorious and colorful?

And make no mistake, we have been called to do marvelous works. And we have been given authority to do them. The chief priests and the elders are not going to stop you and ask "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?", that is a question you are likely only to ask yourself. God has called us to do marvelous works and that is authority enough. But so that others can see that authority we merely need to know that we have been baptized into that authority.

We have been baptized into a life that proclaims by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. We have been baptized into a life that seeks and serves Christ in all persons and loves your neighbor as yourself. We have been baptized into a life that strives for justice and peace among all people, and respects the dignity of every human being. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as one of Christ's own for ever. That is all the authority that we need.

With that authority and God's help, go and create a story worth telling to the next generations, create a story that will result in a magnificent window.

Amen,