

July 9, 2017  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Matthew 11:16-19, 28-30; Psalm 145:8-14

### **GOD IS GOOD**

Our Gospel lesson today is a little strange sounding, at least the first part of it is. It is not at all clear what Jesus is talking about, but he is definitely feeling a little cranky. The tone shifts with the last 3 verses.

I mean what is Jesus talking about? He's criticizing people and he's angry. Apparently, he is angry because he has come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free. Jesus is nothing less than the embodiment of God's favor upon all humanity. [Luke 4:18-19]. These people should be falling over themselves with gratitude, celebrating and praising God for his goodness. But they don't know a good thing when they see it. First came John the Baptist and they criticized him because he ate locusts and wore camel hair and badgered people all the time to repent. Then Jesus came along and they criticize him because he was always laughing and having a good time. He particularly enjoyed being around the unconventional people – sinners like tax collectors and unattached women.

Jesus is just getting annoyed with the shallowness and stubbornness of all these people around him who should have been thanking their lucky stars that are alive while he is near, speaking to them, healing people, showing a better way to live, but instead all they did was find fault and complain because he was different from what they expected and wanted. Jesus is thinking what is it with these people?

When I was in seminary, we had chapel once a week that was led by a full-time staff chaplain who was an ordained Methodist minister. He would open every worship service by hollering "God is Good, All the time."

And then he would holler “God is Good.” And the congregation of seminary students and faculty would shout back “All the time.” I didn’t shout it back though. I just wasn’t comfortable with it. I didn’t really analyze in my head but it was partly because it was just too cliché and reminded me of revival preachers who I’ve only seen in movies and tv and they were never the good guys.

Then one day my Hebrew professor put more light on it. When you take the Biblical languages in seminary it’s not like taking a regular college course in Spanish or French. You can’t separate the theology from the translation when you are learning ancient Hebrew and Greek. I don’t remember what the text was but Professor Patrick said: maybe we’re not speaking the truth when we open worship by shouting God is good, all the time. Whatever Old Testament passage we were looking at, definitely might make you wonder whether God indeed is good all the time.

When you are in the throes of grief, when you are in personal crisis whether it’s a financial problem, a work-place problem or a relationship problem, when you or someone you love is diagnosed with terminal illness, when you are so weary of constant criticizing and complaining, backstabbing, uncivilized bickering and playground style name-calling by our elected leaders you want to give up and just withdraw from the real world, you might not think God is good all the time.

You might think if God was good all the time, God would intervene. God could fix this mess. You might pray and pray that God will fix the mess. And you might never hear an answer to your prayers. And you might wonder if God is good all the time.

Leslie Weatherhead, the author of a short, easy to read, amazing book titled the Will of God, would say that that kind of thinking is the

understandable result of confusion that has come about due to careless efforts to over-simplify what we know about our very complicated God. God's intention for humanity and all the world is and has always been from the beginning of creation, that we would follow Jesus. God's will is that all humanity would live in harmony with God and with each other. God came and lived among us in the form of the man Jesus and God's intention for us was that we would follow him, not kill him. The discipleship of men, not the death of Christ was God's will. But, of all the creatures in creation, God gave free will only to humans.

So, God refrains from intervening when we create circumstances that inflict harm upon each other. To do otherwise would be to eliminate our free will.

God gave us everything we need to live in harmony with him and his whole creation. That we don't is a matter of our collective failure to obey him. And still he does not reject us. He calls us back to his way. You might choose to drop out, give up, or inject more conflict, but those options conflict with everything Christ taught and did. You are free to choose them, but you can't do that and follow Christ at the same time.

It is hard to be a disciple, to follow Christ in the hard times when you feel burdened by the realities of life in the real world. But we are not alone. We have help.

Putting his own, legitimate anger aside, Jesus says "Come to me all of you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

God is indeed good, all the time.