



United Methodist Church of Vista

490 South Melrose Drive—Vista, CA 92081—Phone: (760) 726-0442

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From Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw



Pastor's Ponderings

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” I woke up this morning with this scripture going off in my head like an alarm bell. What do we achieve in life if we gain all things but lose our soul in the process? Every which way I could think to translate this passage kept moving through my brain. It’s a scripture for our time like the Rubik’s cube was to the 80’s. You can find this scripture in Matthew, Mark and Luke but the ethic of it is everywhere in our scriptures.

The context of this teaching from Jesus is the foretelling of his death and resurrection. Jesus is calling his disciples and others to follow him. He is talking about sacrifice for the well-being of all people. Jesus is challenging those who listen to his teaching to focus on what matters, not on the acquisition of goods and things and material. SACRIFICE! There is great consistency in this teaching among the gospels and great consistency in who Jesus challenges us to be. Sometimes following Jesus just doesn’t seem to be much fun, does it?

There was a ‘Peanuts’ cartoon with Charlie Brown reading a newspaper article to Lucy. “It says here that young people of today don’t believe in any causes....” Lucy responds: “That’s not true at all! I believe in a cause. I believe in ME! I’m my own cause. If I’m not a cause what is? I believe in the cause of good ol’ me. That’s the cause I believe in.” Lucy walks away, still ranting and raving. All Charlie Brown can do is turn away and mutter, ‘Good Grief!’

Is Lucy the voice of our time? Is she the one who most closely represents the spirit that is overwhelming our country and community and world? There is a popular theology of some television preachers called the ‘prosperity gospel’ which focuses on prayer and loving God as a means to get all you can. Some Christian leaders believe that if you pray right and live right that God will give you health and wealth. Lucy says it best when she rants and raves... ‘I believe in the cause of ME!’ That’s the origin and conceit at the heart of the prosperity gospel, sometimes called ‘health and wealth theology.’ It starts with you at the center of all that is important rather than putting Jesus or someone else at the heart of our life’s focus.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, ‘Following Jesus means receiving our lives as gifts instead of guarding them as our own possessions. It means sharing the life we have been given instead of bottling it for our own consumption. It means giving up the notion that we can build dams to contain the bright streams of our lives and letting them go instead, letting them swell their banks and spill their wealth, running full and growing fuller.’ Jesus teaches about the value of giving our lives for the care and love of others, and IN SERVICE to God



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because God is the giver of life. The message of Jesus is a counterculture one! The message of Jesus demands we follow him and care for the poor, the lost and the lonely.

This newsletter article has gotten a little preachy and so if you are still reading...thanks for that! As you read this, I have already departed to Zimbabwe (March 20) with packed pens and pencils and some scarfs in my suitcase to give away to folks at the school and in the neighborhood. I'm looking forward to learn from those who live there, about their culture and food and country. I'm excited to see the ruins at the Great Zimbabwe and hope to see some beautiful giraffes. I've learned that curiosity is a great asset in travel. I have often found my soul and life enriched by the people I meet on my journeys.

I pray you profit from meeting people who bless you with wisdom and compassion... on your travels around the world, or around Vista! God bless you today and throughout the rest of Lent.

See you on Palm Sunday!!
Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw