

Jeremiah 11:18-20

Mark 9:30-37

James 3:13-4:3,7-8a

“I will give thanks to you, O Lord,
for you are good.” AMEN!

I love this time of year, don't you?

The temps are slowly beginning to cool.

We get some color change,
here in Tallahassee,
that signals to us that the
fall season is approaching.

This time of year reminds me of when I went to school.

The anxieties about coming classes
and meeting new professors.

What sort of new people I might meet.

It was all very exciting.

There's a fine line between anxiety and excitement.

This time of year brings all of that back to life.

When I came to FSU in 1988, as a freshmen,
you might be able to guess that I was pretty shy.

What's usually the first thing you ask
someone you meet in college,
after their name? :-)

You ask, "Where are you from?"

This was always a good conversation-starter piece
for me because I was from California!

Whoa!

California, like it was a magical unknown realm!

And if it was magical then so (in a way) I was too. :-)

The next question was usually,
"Do you surf?"

"No," I reply.

And explain that the part of California
where I came from the water was pretty cold.

And then I'd lead them into the boring description
about the size of California and that
I wasn't from LA or Beverly Hills...

and suddenly, the magical identity,
I once assumed, kind of drifted away

like the San Francisco fog. (Pause)

This time of year reminds us of what
we were like long ago.

It also reminds might remind us of the ways
we've changed.

When I went to seminary in 2007,
the family and I left Largo, Florida
for Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

and some of those same conversations began again.

"Where you from?"

"Largo, Florida," I'd reply.

"Oh, that's down in the Keys, right?!"

"No, I say, but it is close to the coast."

We lived just a few minutes from the beach.

The next question... "Do you surf?" :-)

"No," I'd reply to a disappointed person as
I'd bore them about the tiny waves
from the Gulf of Mexico that

make surfing impossible.

Some things even after 20 years stayed the same.

But something that didn't stay
the same was my shyness.

In college, I hardly asked questions of professors,
but in seminary they could hardly get me
to shut-up! :-)

Why do we wear robes?

Why do some churches commune children?

Why do we pay so much attention to Martin Luther,
when we could be paying attention
more to Jesus?

You might imagine the way some professors
would roll their eyes at my many questions.
(Pause)

One of the requirements in seminary is
to do a cultural immersion.

It is usually done in January for 3 weeks and
happened just before the spring semester
classes began.

A group of seminarians and a couple professors
went to Mexico City and some of
the surrounding towns to complete
our immersion.

We met with advocacy groups and even
some low level government officials.

You probably know that there is
a huge income disparity gap in Mexico.

There is a population of super-rich and
a large population of people living in poverty.

There's barely any middle class.

In some of the smaller towns we'd marvel
at utility poles that brought
electricity into the town.

A single pole would have hundreds of wires
connected to it to draw power into homes
that couldn't afford standard hook up.

When we met with one official we talked
about this and they explained to us

that the practice was allowed to happen

because it made revolt less likely to occur.

When the danger of such practices
were discussed they said the danger of
no electricity was greater than
the danger of electrocution or fire.

We learned things by asking questions and
learning that companies like Wal-Mart in
Mexico would hire people to collect
shopping carts but not pay them
an hourly wage.

No, they'd be hired to receive a uniform and
then they'd rely on collecting carts
for shoppers and hopefully receive a tip.

A question that we began to ask one another
was "How many will have to die
before such practices will change?"

Of course, we could never come up
with an answer, but we made sure
that we were never afraid to ask
the question. (Pause)

Today, in Mark's gospel, we read about
Jesus' second prediction about what will
happen to him when he gets to Jerusalem.

It's quite similar to last week's passion prediction,
but with a couple differences.

At this one, Jesus makes note of
something rather ominous.

"The Son of Man is to be betrayed
into human hands," he said.

This is ominous for two reasons.

The first is that Jesus' was privately teaching
his disciples here so this betrayal prediction
is directed to one or more of them.

We, of course, know Jesus was speaking
about Judas and his clear act of betrayal,
but upon deeper inspection
(since we know the story)

we recognize the way other disciples
betrayed Jesus in his time of need.

Whether by Peter's denial to even know Him or
the other's decision to flee when
the going got tough.

It was betrayal by abandonment and denial.

What is also ominous in Jesus' prediction is
that Jesus foretold that he'd not have any
Godly protection during these events.

This went directly in contrast with the words
Jesus heard at his baptism.

Words from God that said,

“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased.”

We wonder, how did Jesus understand
the reality of his identity and
measure the truth that God would
let humanity have its way with him?

Did that mean Jesus was betrayed by God? (Hmm)

The answer to the question is no.

At least “No” to the “betrayal” part.

Human beings are betrayers.

We can be disloyal, double-dealers,
and stab others in the back, but
God will not.

The word in the original
language is paradidomatei,
which is better translated as “to hand over.”

Thus the sentence is read this way,
“The Son of Man is to be handed over
into the hands of men.”

God didn't betray Jesus but
Jesus was handed over to humanity
for us to decide what to do with him.

And this really matters!

Because if we know what to do with this Jesus
then we know what we will do with our lives.

The disciples, upon hearing this prediction from Jesus
were afraid to ask even when
they didn't understand what he was saying.

The reading continues to tell us what
they weren't afraid to talk about, or argue about,
was who among them was the greatest.

(Pause)

Beloved, we know the power of the risen Christ
and we still want to talk about who's

the best and greatest among us.

We sense in our bodies the ways our hearts
never rest and how we yearn for something
more and try to fill up the void with things
that seem to work,

but those things are just a temporary satisfactions.

We lie awake wondering what is our purpose
and Jesus speaks to us, to call us out of
the complacency,

because Jesus knows that it is Him we need.

He's the One who gave us all these things.

We know the power of the risen Christ,
but ignore the suffering children in
war-torn regions.

We know the power of the risen Christ,
but get complacent and afraid to ask
questions when policymakers
write legislation hurts public education or

takes the rights away from women
to make healthcare decisions with their doctor.

We know the power of the risen Christ,
but keep the money in our wallets that could
be used for building relationships and
making disciples.

Not just about getting butts in the pews
but about telling people about Jesus and
his loud expression of God's love
for the world and all the creatures in it.

(Pause)

"There's a story about a pastor who was
meeting with the church council about how
to retire a sizable debt that the church owed.

During the meeting, an angel of the Lord appeared
and the angel wanted to reward the pastor
for their service.

The angel asked,

"What would you want God to give you:
infinite wealth or infinite wisdom?"

Without blinking, the pastor asked for wisdom.

"Granted!" Said the angel and vanished.

After a stunned pause by the witnesses of the event.

The Council President leaned over and
asked the pastor what wisdom
they could offer them now.

The pastor looked at them rather
sheepishly and replied.

The wisdom is saying I should have
asked for infinite wealth.” :-)

The disciples argued about who’s the greatest,
while Jesus taught and demonstrated mercy,
service, love, and invitations to follow him
into life abundant.

It’s divine wisdom that should be visible
in the ways we live.

All of you, who give to the mission of the church,
(whether your gift is by donation or
service or sometimes both)

You keep the lights on, and
the gospel proclaimed and
you keep the vision of Jesus’
inclusion of children first.

You get it. Thank you!

For your giving, for your prayers, and
for your divine wisdom.

Without you, things would look far different in here
and the community out there would suffer
even more than it is suffering.

AMEN!