

PASTOR'S PRAYER AND SERMON

Please note that the following are the pastor's notes for his sermon and may therefore have some grammatical or spelling errors, etc.

Tenth Sunday of Pentecost

Treasure Map to Heaven

"Understanding the Instructions"

August 14, 2022

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19;

Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

Grace and peace, my friends:

Last Sunday, we started a new sermon series called "Treasure Map to Heaven." I shared that these sermons will take us on the adventure of knowing some of Jesus' sayings about Heaven.

As a result, we have been referring to those pirate-hidden treasures as an allegory. Understanding how to interpret the treasure map is essential for many of these treasure hunters. Having a map is one thing, but knowing how to read it is different. Any ambiguity or misunderstanding in this interpretation could result in years' costs. Time, money, and energy must be spent, not to mention the chance that the sought-after treasure will never be found.

Is this not what happens to many who seek God?

People seek God but fail to find Him because they look in the wrong places. They seek the heavenly without realizing that to understand the heavenly, they must first understand the earthly. They look disappointed at something that could be right in front of them.

Do you remember Nicodemus, the Jewish doctor of the law? He asks Jesus how to enter into the kingdom of God. To what Jesus simply answers: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3.) This man could not understand Jesus' words. And he interprets it as returning to the maternal womb instead of having a new life in Christ. Can you see that Nicodemus has the map, but he misunderstands the instructions.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses a clearly prophetic style to summarize His entire life and ministry among us. And he does it in an unusual way saying, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze!" (v.49).

What is Jesus talking about?

The enigmatic nature of His language leads Bible scholars and ordinary people to look in different directions for an answer. Just like the treasure hunt, it

can lead us to different paths; if we don't know how to interpret what Jesus is trying to tell us.

Jesus speaks of fire. However, we often attribute fire negatively because we associate it with the same fire of hell, which we have biblically learned.

But also, the image of fire invites us to approach the mystery of Jesus more ardently and passionately.

So, what is this mystery that Jesus speaks about?

In English, a "mystery" is something dark, secret, a riddle. What is 'mysterious' is inexplicable, even incomprehensible. The Greek word "mysterion," however, is different. Although it is still a "secret" and no longer carefully guarded but open. More simply, "mysterion" is a truth hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now made known by God's revelation.

So if we understand that this hidden treasure can be revealed in Christ Jesus, we can also understand that the fire that burns within us is a passion for God and compassion for those suffering. Therefore, the mystery of Jesus will never remain enclosed in dogmatic formulas nor in the wise books. Nor is reduced interpretations of people who believe they speak for Jesus. No one will write a definitive book on Jesus. No one will be able to follow Jesus with a dull heart or

bored piety, but with a fire that fills our hearts, like the very fire of the Holy Spirit.

If we remember the life of John Wesley, the human founder of Methodism, his search for this "Heavenly Treasure" took him to places where the gospel seemed unproductive. Why? Because John did it in his own strength, not letting him be carried away by that internal fire God puts in us. That fire that moves mountains. That is why in his diary, at the moment of expressing his own conversion on May 24, 1738, the story says that that evening John reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans. About 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Where did John Wesley find that fire in his heart?

Where did John find the mystery of Jesus revealed?

It was not at Oxford University between academics and theological studies. It was not in his years of ministry as a priest of the Church of England. It was not in his trip to America in search of the evangelization of the

natives. It was not in his experiences of charity and practice of the means of grace. It was in a small Moravian church on Aldersgate Street in London. As historians of Methodism say: "This was the pivotal event in Wesley's life that ultimately led to the development of the Methodist movement in Britain and America."

Now, do you realize why I say that the words of Jesus make hearts burn with the fire of the Holy Spirit when we understand the directions of the heavenly map?

The Gospel of Matthew 11:25 tells us that Jesus says: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Jesus combats religious formalism, inhuman rigorism, and narrow interpretations of the law. Nothing and no one can chain His freedom to do good. We can never follow Jesus or find this treasure of eternal life, living by religious standards. Jesus is unpredictable because His love is unpredictable. You may wonder, but how can that be?

Let us continue reflecting on the biblical text with this idea in mind. Jesus is unpredictable because His love is unpredictable.

Jesus ignites conflicts. He does not extinguish them. Jesus acts like someone who puts out a fire with

kerosene instead of water. Because Jesus has not come to bring false tranquility but tensions, confrontation, and divisions. Actually, he gets the conflict into our own hearts. It is impossible to defend ourselves from the call of Jesus behind our shields and walls. Especially when we put our religious rites or social practices; into placing the action of Jesus first.

Jesus is a verb; he is not a noun. Jesus is action and not just the word that designates Him as a person. Jesus is calling us to live in truth and to love without selfishness. Jesus calls us out of our comfort zone. He calls us to feel uncomfortable. That is when Jesus shows His unpredictable mystery of Him.

The disciples feel their hearts burning when they hear Jesus' words while walking beside Him. Do you remember the biblical passage of the disciples on the road to Emmaus?

"Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized [Jesus,], and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24: 31-32)

Where is it possible to feel that fire of Jesus today? Where can we experience the force of his mystery?

Jesus invites us not to an easy gospel; but to a compromised gospel. And I'm not talking about attending worship every Sunday. I speak of that commitment to Jesus that makes us uncomfortable, that Jesus that annoys us with His words, that He does not let us sleep until we move in action.

Although the Christian faith seems to be extinguished among us today, the fire brought by Jesus to the world continues to burn under the ashes. We can't let it go out. Without fire in the heart, it is impossible to follow Jesus and understand the road map to Heaven. <><
Amen.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER

Oh Lord, our God, how many times has it been challenging to follow Your words? Especially when You say that you bring division instead of peace. How do we understand that call?

Some of these situations call us to decide between good and evil, between the earthly and the heavenly. Between the blessing and the curse. Between the signs of life and the signs of death.

God, too often, we assume that reality depends on our interpretation of the world. We believe that we are wise in our own opinion and that our view is the only valid one. And

we treat You, O God, with arrogance, as if it were Your duty to carry out our wishes and orders. That list of whims we think we deserve.

So, God ... call us to be disciples determined to follow You, to take the option of life over death. To take the option for justice over injustice. Instead of the easy way, take the choice of the gospel with all its complexity and challenges.

Call us to recognize that following Your path means crucifying our own ego, our own desires, and our own wishes.

Remind us of the price You paid to love us; by sending Your Son Jesus in propitiation for our sins.

Remind us of all that is possible when your followers love one another and the whole world without exception. So that the transformation of the world is possible and your kingdom continues to spread and be present in the lives of many.

Guides, through the treasure map to heaven, like the prayer that Your Son Jesus Christ taught His disciples saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.