

Jemez Springs Presbyterian Church  
November 10, 2024  
25th Sunday After Pentecost  
“Lavish Giving in a Land of Want and Plenty”  
Psalm 127:1-2, Mark 12:38-44  
Rev. Karen Cobb

First thoughts.

A nation is judged by the way it cares for its people.

We have a huge and very diverse population. Some might say, too big to be

effectively governed by any one leader or ideology. We also live in a democracy where votes are carefully cast and counted every four years to reflect the will of the people.

We have principles of checks and balances for a reason so no one ideology,

party, or faction has complete control of the process.

We have due process which requires participation from the populace but which must be governed by sober judgment and wise consideration of the fabric of the whole nation.

We are together in this place, in this moment, however to be reclaimed, rebalanced and reminded that our ultimate citizenship is in the kingdom of God. Our opening hymn, written by Martin Luther over 500 years ago, twice

the age of our nation, reminds us that our God has always been our help and

will continue to be our safe refuge from all the stormy blast. We have heard

the psalmist remind us that trying to build a house, that is to build a life or a community without God's guidance will be full of folly and anxiety.

Our gospel text from Mark reminds us that our Savior continues to prepare us

and his disciples for his passion that is to come. If you recall the past weeks

that Takako and others have been guiding you, the disciples have had a hard

time understanding that Jesus' message is not about who will be first or whose

blindness is more debilitating. He counsels them continually to trust in God and to attend to the needs of the outcast, the most vulnerable, and to know

that even the most powerless has the ear and the eye of our Lord as an advocate. This morning's passage from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter will be his last public

teaching before his road to the cross begins.

I invite you to take a few moments to consider again the gospel, attending to

where you find yourself in the story:

**\*\*Do you feel remorse as the scribes who walk about with pretense and self-importance, learned people blind to their own privilege?**

**\*\*Do you resonate with Jesus' outrage and disgust toward the scribes?**

\*\*Do you resonate with some of the crowds, adding their offerings, each trying to do their share?

\*\*Do you feel pity for the widow, for her poverty or outrage for her life experience that puts her in that position?

\*\*Do you feel concern for her survival? Are you that widow?

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We cannot know for sure what all motivations were present in this teaching, but we do find not a shred of self-pity in the widow. She is empowered to make a choice and to act decisively, lavishly, generously. Perhaps Jesus identifies with her, preparing his disciples for his journey to put in everything he had for the glory of God.

We know that God sees through pretense and sees the longings and intentions of our hearts. God is always redeeming us and renewing us for the

work of the day. God sees us, our intentions, our actions and accepts us, even

when our efforts may be overlooked to others.

It is a powerful lesson for us to hear today, as the beloved community in a fractured world. What are we, as the Body of Christ, called to do in this time:

\*\*to create patient, safe space to hear a different point of view and to hear underneath it, the human longing?

\*\*to work with determination for mutual care for the poor and outcast?

\*\*to challenge unjust systems of oppression

\*\*to pray soberly with self-examination of what is our work to do?

\*\*to joyful work of preparing for Christ's reconciliation in this world

When it all seems too much, dogs and children are insistent, intuitive reminders of the need to get outside, to get out in nature to clear your head.

Staying inside and pacing or watching endless newsreels leads to squirrely behavior.

Movement helps rebalance our minds, gets our blood flowing, opens up our lungs, loosens our aching muscles, and restores balance to our perspective.

It is also important to watch where you step, so you don't plummet down a ravine, turn your ankle or step in something disgusting.

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I want to close with a story from 27 years ago, when I was brand new to New

Mexico, invited by friends for a hike in your backyard, near Battleship Rock. My

husband and I, along with our ebullient 18 month old daughter were eager to

explore our new home. So off we went, tromping up a dirt trail which wound

back and forth through beautiful pinon. I believe we crossed streams at least

seven times, with the guys portaging giggling Clarissa each time. It was about

90 minutes into the hike that our friends let us know that this was their first time hiking in this place, and that they didn't have a map. We laughed and kept going. Then it started to rain. And we lost the trail. And then it rained harder. We found ourselves on hands and knees, scrambling up slippery foliage. We passed a cow skull which we knew was emblematic of New Mexico, but it wasn't particularly comforting. A coyote howled. Daylight began to wane. Our courage started to get shaky. And then, in the distance, the sound of an engine. "Yay!" announced Clarissa... "A car!" We were saved.

Learnings, perhaps applicable for our road ahead:

Go with a guide, preferably one who knows the way.

Prepare for adventure. Bring water. Bring a can-do attitude.

Keep your eye on the trail.

Travel together. Keep watching the landmarks.

Help each other over the rough spots.

Keep going. Praise God for the journey.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Oh Lord,

Life passes by swiftly. Events that a few years ago kept me totally preoccupied

have now become vague memories, conflicts that a few months ago seemed

so crucial in my life now seem futile and hardly worth the energy; inner turmoil that robbed me of my sleep only a few weeks ago has now become a

strange emotion of the past; books that filled with amazement a few days ago

do not seem as important; thoughts that kept my mind captive only a few hours ago have now lost their power and have been replaced by others...

Why am I continuously trapped in this sense of urgency and emergency?

Why do I not see that you are eternal, that your kingdom lasts forever, and that

for you a thousand years are like one day O Lord, let me enter into your

presence and there taste the eternal, timeless everlasting love with which you

invited me to let go of my time-bound anxieties, fears, preoccupations ns

worries, Lord, teach me your ways and give me the courage to follow them.

Henri Nouwen