

November 19, 2017  
24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, IA  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

### **God's Outrage, God's Gifts**

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Anyone look at the world these days and feel a little outraged? When we hear about mass shootings, sexual harassment, child abuse, white supremacists marching in the streets, we can get pretty angry at the world. I also weary of all the outrage around and within me. It doesn't really help matters and often makes things worse.

Given that background, it can be hard to know what to make of the outrage we hear from God today in the reading from the prophet Zephaniah. God says, "I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung."

We also hear that we have a God who isn't pleased with our complacency, who says, "I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.'"

All that makes your friend's angry Facebook posts sound like Mr. Rogers in comparison.

I should probably make it very clear that I did not choose these readings for this Stewardship Sunday. This Sunday, like every Sunday, we're using the assigned readings for the day from the larger church's common set of readings called the lectionary.

The lectionary helps keep preachers and congregations honest- we don't get to just pick the readings we like, the ones that make us feel good, the ones that reinforce what we already think. The lectionary helps ensure that the readings don't sound like a warm, fuzzy Hallmark card. I think that goal was achieved today! Both in the first reading, and in the Gospel. where we were here, again, about someone being sent in outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This picture of God frightens many of us. Sometimes it turns us away from God - we think, "no thanks, not going there, not touching that with a ten-foot pole."

Both of those things seem to be going on for the third worker in the parable from Matthew today, the guy who buries the money entrusted to him. He tells the Master, I knew you were harsh and angry so that's why I just buried the treasure you gave me. He seems afraid, he seems to just not want to deal with the Master. I get that. There are times I want to avoid the angry parts of God- this week I was tempted to cut part of the assigned Zephaniah reading so we didn't have to deal with it and, true confession here, I actually added in the last 3 verses that sound nicer. There are times I wish we just had a Hallmark God who made me feel warm and fuzzy all the time. Except then I look at the state of the world and I realize warm and fuzzy isn't going to cut, isn't even going to come close to addressing all the issues we've got going on- all our selfishness and greed and complacency and hatred. We need justice and righteousness and God's shalom- God's true wellbeing for all people. Warm, fuzzy, sentimental, niceness doesn't bring real hope.

What does bring me hope is that God passionately engages our world working for justice and righteousness.

God isn't like us who get outraged but often stop there. God's anger is a refining fire of justice and righteousness. And God is always actively bringing in justice and wellbeing.

Sometimes that means that God calls us out and convicts us when we are lazy, complacent or complicit in injustice. It also means that God gives us what we need to share in God's work and to experience joy and hope. God gives to us abundantly.

God is like the Master in the gospel parable today who entrusts his workers with all his property-all that he owns. Each worker gets a major gift- one talent was equivalent to fifteen years of wages. They don't all get the same amount but they all have major resources available to them.

In the same way, God entrusts us with resources, with abundant gifts, and God expects us to use them, to multiply them, to do God's work with them by increasing justice, righteousness, shalom.

But one of the workers in the parable chooses not to do anything with what he's been given. Rather than gratefully receiving his gift and getting to work, he hides what the Master gives him. Rather than getting out there and putting the Master's resources to work, he focuses on his concerns about the Master's temperament and the situation.

Perhaps he gets fixated on why he only got one talent rather than five and gets hung up in comparing himself to the others, in feeling sorry for himself. Maybe he thinks he doesn't have enough for himself or enough to make a difference and gets hung up in feeling inadequate. Maybe he feels put upon by being asked to do something more when he feels like he's already done enough. Maybe he gets paralyzed by the fear of not measuring up to the Master's expectations, or maybe he just doesn't want to deal with a Master who can get passionate.

I get that, I've so been to all those places-sometimes I go to each of them many times a day.

But when I go to any of those places of fear, jealousy, inadequacy, avoidance-I miss out on the joy of the Master and on the chance to participate with the Master in making the world more just, more well. I find myself stuck in darkness, weeping, gnashing my teeth, outraged and despairing about the state of the world and my own heart. What little hope I did have is taken away.

But God does not leave me there. God doesn't leave us stuck in these places, God does not leave us buried. Our passionate God continues to call us out- to convict us and call us out from all the things that trap us, all the ways we hide. And God continues pour out the resources of faith, hope, love, joy and forgiveness into our hearts.

Day after day, week after week in worship, God calls us out and God pours out abundance upon us. And day after day, God asks us to use what we've been given to participate in God's work in the world. As we do, we enter into the joy of our Master, again and again.

Thanks be to God.