

Travel Stories: *The Minimalist* - wk 11

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presbyterian Church of Newton, KS - Sept. 27, 2020
Luke 19:11-27 *The Message paraphrase* (Adapted from Eugene Peterson's book *Tell it Slant*)

We're concluding our message series today looking at Jesus' conversations. These are the Travel Stories Jesus told, while walking along from Galilee, through Samaria, and on to Jerusalem. These stories are about God's love and rescue.

As a main resource for this series, I've been drawing from Eugene Peterson's book *Tell it Slant* and he notes that this story encapsulates a central theme we find throughout the entire bible, the entire biblical story. The central theme has two strands: God wants us, but we don't always want God.

Soon Jesus will arrive in Jerusalem for Holy Week and there will be shouts of joy as they welcome their king. Yet no sooner do they welcome Him than they begin to call Him king with contempt during His trial and crucifixion. It turns out that part of us is drawn to Jesus' and His Way, but we don't know if He's safe as our King.

Let's look at the first theme, which we need to remember as we consider the second theme.

Theme one: **God wants us**. Jesus' stories are spoken in a world in which God wants us. We were created by God and He delights in us. He delights in our hearts and wants

us to enjoy a friendship with Him. Though we may find ourselves estranged from God; God is determined to win us back. God wants us as His beloved. It's central to our human story. Therefore, God insistently, relentlessly, and continuously pursues us for restored relationship. God is and has always been seeking us. He was seeking us long before we had any idea He love us.

One of the ways to say this is, "God is the first mover in in our relationship." Like the Prodigal Father, God has run to us with His love and rescue. He doesn't wait around for us to come up with the idea of God. Psalm 50:3 says, **"Our God comes and does not keep silent."** We don't come to God; God comes to us. We don't start the conversation; God starts it. And good news, God's given us a guarantee in Jesus, that He won't lose us. Romans 8:38-39 tells us this, **I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.**

This is good news whenever we think we're not going to make it in the Christian life. Just that thought alone shows that we are making it. We who feel *poor in the things of God* will find more of God than we every imagined. It was Jesus' promise in the first Beatitude. If we're concerned we've given up on God, *"you lucky bums,"* know that He hasn't given up on you. His love is loyal and steadfast.

But still there are times when we feel the other theme we see in the Bible. Times when we feel... **we don't want God.** I think that is when we are afraid God is not good.

The well-documented evidence of history is that we so often want to be our own gods. Every continent and civilization, every century and every religion says this. It is irrefutable. We want to be gods.

The evidence is thoroughly and convincingly confirmed in our Scriptures and documented in each and every one of our lives. God is a rival, not an ally, in the god-business. Enter Jesus' story of the noble who returned as king, he returned to a people who "hated him" and didn't want him to be their king. They didn't want his rule over them.

Jesus told this final Samaritan road story as He approached Jerusalem where people would welcome Him as King, but then kill Him. He's telling this story, because there's a portion of our humanity that doesn't want Him to be our King. Doesn't want to live in His Kingdom rule now.

There can be little doubt, I think, that the crowds cheering for Jesus as their new king expected an angel army to wipe out the Roman rule that day for good, but it didn't happen. Meanwhile this story was probably working its way through the imaginations of Jesus' followers: *The servants didn't want their king to come back. Oh, they wanted all he had given them, but they didn't want him.*

As a result of this story, this final Samaritan story, a new identity began to form in them. *Of course we don't want to be ruled over, but what is the option Jesus offers. This man, Jesus, has the words of Life.*

We don't want anyone to rule us, but when we remember His ways are good and the stuff of resurrection, that He can even use the refuse, the manure, the bad stuff of this world for good in our lives, then we want Jesus' Way. At some point we've learned, *"I did it my way"* is not as good as I did it Jesus' Way.

If we think back to the stories Jesus told, we begin speaking His way; relating to God as *Abba, Father* and friend; blessing others and offering forgiveness; discovering neighbors in unlikely places; coming to the realization that with God everything is personal, He knows the number of hairs on our heads and cares about every tear that falls, He loves us that much; and we remember Jesus' love for manure, though it takes us time to grasp, manure is symbolic of God's a resurrection work in us: God's turning death into life. Digging around us God goes the next step and improves the soil we sit in, then with patience God produces fruit in us in season. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Now we are living in step with Him. No, not every season will produce fruit, but abiding in Him through the ups and downs, we will produce fruit in season. He promises.

Now having heard what Jesus is on about through these stories, we want to know Jesus, be His friend, put our faith in Jesus and we pray our first prayer as He taught us to pray, “*Abba Father.*” It turns out our King is also our Father. It doesn’t get any better than this. If you don’t believe me, soak in Jesus’ stories again.

We can remember Jesus’ words that prayer is not about going to an impersonal judge, it’s about enjoying God as friend. Jesus’ teaches that prayer uses the personal words that friends use. We now welcome His love and grace.

This kingdom of God stuff Jesus talks about is not a matter of waking up each morning with a list of chores, a list of To Do’s left for us by the Holy Spirit. This isn’t a burden we take on. The burden was lifted when we accepted Jesus’ Way. As Jesus’ followers, we wake up everyday in the large story of God’s love and rescue and from Jesus’ stories we get a feel for His Way: the way He does life, the way He talks, the way He treats people, and the way of His Kingdom.

After this story, Jesus goes to Jerusalem. We read of His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, but the story doesn’t end there. In Jesus’ last Travel Story, the “sums of money” invested represent these stories Jesus told, which still get us active in what God is still doing in and around us, in our homes and workplaces and neighborhoods.

These stories continue to be told today, yes through sermons like mine, but more so in our imaginations in our daily lives. Stories to inspire us and get us active in the life of God. Eugene Peterson says, *This final story is sobering: non-participation is not a casual matter. Non-participation is missing the mark. The story is unrelenting: self-serving minimalistic avoidance of the Kingdom is not an option. There are no non-participants in Jesus' Kingdom.*

I think it's actually impossible for Jesus' people to not participate, even if we think we aren't. This final story is about hope: for there is plenty of room for timid, meek participation. Yes. Note that seven of the servants are not commented on at all. The other seven servants are not condemned for their seemingly un-noticed, perhaps unremarkable work. It's simply true for everyone that a lot of our following Jesus will go unnoticed, be inconspicuous.

When you consider that loving your neighbor consistently won't really make the national news, I'd say there's hope for Jesus' Way. Resurrection is happening. We are going to make it. He came to give us the good news of His love and rescue. And we know He won't be defeated, slowed, or hurried. Jesus wins!

The gospel according to Jesus is the announcement that history has entered a new era, turned a corner. Heaven is invading the earth. God's rescue plan is well underway. Our Father will bring us Home.

My mother in law wrote a poem that I'd like to use as our closing prayer, sort of a mediation. It's called, *Life's Trail*.

When you are **young**

You **wonder** whether your problems
Will turn out right or wrong

When you are **older**

You **question** whether you
Have made the correct choices

When you are **wiser**

You **ask** how you can change
The wrong things you've done

When you've **walked with God**

You **pray** you have
Honored Him in all your ways

Close to the **Pearly Gates**

You **thank** Him for His forgiveness
And **praise** God for grace

At **trails end . . .**

You are just **thrilled** to be home
And **wrapped** in God's Arms.