

## “Notes from God”

### 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (L14) – July 5, 2020 – Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30/A

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] <sup>16</sup>“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, <sup>17</sup>‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus said, “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; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Grace and peace to you from God the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

On any given day all across this country and around the world, folks walk into small rooms where people are gathered together, and you will hear them say something like this, “My name is Jane Doe, and I’m an alcoholic.” Any of you who are in recovery, or have friends or relatives in 12-Step programs, are familiar with that first step - the one that must be taken before all the others - the one that says, “*We admit that we are powerless over \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with your addiction) and that our lives have become unmanageable.*”

We have just completed our own version of this first step, in speaking the words of the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness. As Christian commentator Brain Stoffregen says, “*Repentance is an “I can’t” experience. Can you imagine America declaring that it can’t do something or that it is powerless over something? Our American attitude is more like, ‘If we only had more money and people, we could win ...’ Perhaps I’m too pessimistic, but I believe that the power of sin is stronger than (even) America’s great wisdom and intelligence.*”

These days we are being called to examine ourselves: who are we as Americans? Who are we as Christians? Who are we as we stare into the face of injustice and oppression? And now, as we discover and uncover the answers to those questions, we are faced with the fundamental question for all of you (sitting here) or watching this worship. That question is: who is God?

Which makes me recall one of the first questions asked by my Ethics Professor at seminary, Marty Stortz. She asked us to envision the pictures on our Sunday School walls. For some of us there might be a distinct difference between not only the images of God we grew up with, but our images of America; our images of what being a Christian looks like; images of our brothers and sisters whose skin sets them apart as “different” as well as our current images of God.

Which of the images you brought forward still fit? Which ones need renovation or outright replacement? Which are the images that better fit our experience? How did we get so far from the revelation of God in Jesus? Perhaps we have misunderstood God over these many years. If we were to ask God that simple question directly, it is very possible that God would reply, “*Child, one thing I know is that I AM not who you think I am.*”

So, let’s consider today just how amazing it is that even if we might never **know** God on this side of Heaven, our loving Father **knows us** very well.

Did you ever have one of those times when you actually recognize a message from God? You might call it a “God moment” or a “God wink” - when we can see God’s handiwork or realize that God has been leaving us “love notes” all along?

All today’s texts focus on the serendipity of how we imagine God. In fact, Matthew’s Gospel starts out with Jesus’ comment on how we have learned from other wayward children, playing in the marketplace. (A bit of historical background might be helpful here.) Flutes and dancing indicate a wedding feast, at which **men** would dance. Wailing and mourning indicate a funeral, at which **women** whirl and cry. So in our playground scene, the girls are yelling, “*Hey guys, wanna play funeral?*” And the boys are saying, “*Naw, but how about wedding?*” Children, already learning to “have it their way” – and never satisfied. And the adults look on and say, “*Just what is it that you kids want?*”

You know how frustrating kids can be; now see with God’s eyes: First, he sends something familiar, an Old Testament prophet with notes from God. He came fasting and speaking words of discipline that somehow the people had forgotten as they grew. “Repent!” said John the Baptist, and the people read God’s note named John and said, “*He has a demon!*”

So, God tried again using the New Testament “Messiah format” note, with a man who came eating, drinking and celebrating life and wholeness, and they cried out against Jesus, because they didn’t like the notes he was passing out, either. “*He’s a glutton, a drunkard!*”

Yes, we are fickle, we faithful followers...You’d think that God would get frustrated with us, or at least impatient, as we open God’s notes to us and leave them on the shelf, or worse, never even open them at all! Luckily God does not send us a postcard that says simply, “*Just what is it that you people WANT?*”

Think about all the notes God has been sending us lately: ***Love your neighbor***, especially your vulnerable neighbor – pick up some extra groceries, or make breakfast bags, or buy school supplies to help out during the pandemic. ***Pray for your persecutors*** – maybe those folks that aren’t wearing a mask because they don’t feel sick! Forgive them, for they must really not know what they do...Or how about those protestors who are calling for an end to the militarization of our police forces – ***Don’t you know God wants you to listen*** to their yearning for justice and the same freedoms we take for granted? The note might be encouraging us to read, to listen, to find out more, to really hear the stories of injustices that have kept our brothers and sisters living their lives in fear.

Will we ignore the call for “repentance”? Or will we find a way to put the purple mountains majesty and the glory of the Lord into the lives of those who deserve it as much as we do?

Just like Paul, we know what God wants (as Micah would say,) “*to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.*” Or, in Jesus’ words, “*to love God with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves.*” Paul envisioned that kind of faith, too, and could not achieve it. Just like Paul, we find we are at war within ourselves, and with brother Martin Luther we proclaim, “*we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.*”

And that, dear friends, is the key that unlocks the note that contains the truest picture of God and us: **We cannot. But God can. We will not. But God will.** God can and will love us no matter what we think, just because **God is love**. Jesus embodies that picture of God in his words today: Stop! Lay down the heavy yoke the world and you make for yourself and accept the one God has made *for you*—the one God made you, for.

Yes, when Jesus says, “**Come,**” don’t say, “later.”

When Jesus says, “**rest,**” don’t say, “too busy!”

When Jesus says, “**take MY yoke,**” don’t say, “can’t make me,”

When Jesus says, “**learn from me,**” don’t say, “we know better.”

No wonder we are so tired and don’t understand our own God – we keep ignoring the God notes and invitations that come every day, offering the “soul-rest” for which our hearts yearn.

A few years ago, I stood at a crossroads outside the German town of Erfurt, beside the Luther stone, where Luther cried out in fear of a lightning storm. He pleaded for St. Anne to save his life, and he pledged to become a monk. (While we do belong to the priesthood of all believers, I don’t believe that is the vocation God expects from each of us.) But today we, too, stand at a crossroads of surrender to God. If you are honest, you have probably been receiving God notes, God winks and God moments encouraging you to do just that – to say from your heart, “God, I can’t. But you can.”

So, let me leave you with words from Jeremiah 6:16. “*Stand at the crossroads and look, and ask for the ancient paths where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*” God loves you. Jesus invites you to dine with him today. The Holy Spirit is your constant companion to help shoulder your burdens and so you are never alone. So come, breathe, rest, and give in to God. Start right now to watch for his presence, and to look for those love notes that have been left all over your life – the ones meant just for you - from the One who loved you first...and the One who most certainly loves you best. Amen.

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