

Third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 7 – Year A – June 21, 2020 - Bill Skubi

Genesis 21:8-21, Romans 6:1b-11, Matthew 10:24-39

Our contemporary gospel and the Old Testament of *American* history. -Bill Skubi

Gospel means “Good News”, but the news in this time is very hard, just as our Gospel passage for the day is very hard, so how do we make sense of it as followers of Jesus in this present age.

I am not a person who considers biblical prophesy a predictor of future events, but if I were pressed to single out a pronouncement of Jesus that has come to pass in our lifetime it would be found in today’s gospel passage, where our lord and savior foresaw the age of smart phone cameras and Internet.

Matthew 10, 26

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Just as our gospel reading seems to leap right out of today’s news headlines, the Old Testament reading perfectly encapsulates the original tragedy of American history.

Genesis 21:8-21

‘The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

This Discrimination between the offspring of slave and free fits a pattern of our history, “First prevent children from playing together, something many of us experienced as children, and to this purpose, so the inheritance will not be shared between them.

And we could not have a greater contrast between Old and New Testament readings. We have the old covenant of allegiance to clan and tribe, and the New Covenant rejection of clan and tribe for the Way of the Cross.

155 years after chattel slavery was finally ended in this country the average household net worth of Black Families is 1/10 that of White households. The inheritance has not been shared.

There is NO innocence in the systemic racism that is baked into American life.

When I was growing up, I was presented with the **same factual reality as today**, reported several times a year in the Seattle Times. Each brief report was practically the same “Negro killed by police while resisting arrest.” The lesson, “resisting arrest could get you killed,” but why did I accept the coincidence that the death by police was always the fate of black men.

These were whispers in secret, less than a column inch of newsprint in the back pages of the paper, now live video footage is in our face, screaming from the Rooftops.

Still, it is all too easy to see this as the work of other people, but it is not. **We** have not shared the inheritance; we all share the responsibility.

We do not have to dig too deeply into these scriptures to find their truth in our lives. That we are indeed one family, the American nation is one family and it is time to share equally in our inheritance.

Can we be the change we want to see? Yes, we can, but if we do not act with focused effort and expense **to rectify the evil then** we continue to sin as Paul says; trusting that Christ at great price has reconciled us to God by grace, when we are unwilling to bear the cost of reconciling with our African American and Native American and Latin American and Asian American brothers and sisters.

Jan and I recently began a project on our property of dismantling a fence that we build 26 years ago. It was hard enough to build when we were in our 40s and it is hard exhausting work to take it down now. We originally built the fence for the usual purpose of keeping our chattel property, in this case sheep, from running away.

There are stout wooden corner posts with 45 metal fence posts set every eight feet in between. We spent last weekend laboriously removing four crimped steel wire clips from every one of those metal fence posts. It is difficult, time consuming work. The top two Clips of every fence post are in plain sight and not too difficult to pry open and remove. But to reach the bottom two we have to get on our knees and hunt among the grass and field weeds that have woven itself halfway up the wire field fencing.

The bottom clip is almost always buried in the dirt on the bottom strand of wire.

We have to remove each clip so as not to leave a dangerous steel shard that could ruin mowing equipment or worse, injure a neighbor if thrown by the mower. It is exhausting and difficult work but even with every fastener removed the wire field fencing was still held firmly in place by 26 years of grass and weeds growing through the wire, just like

removing the statutory supports of slavery have not freed the fabric of American life from the legacy of overt racism.

Unless Jan and I go to considerable personal expense to hire someone with a tractor to pull the fencing away from the posts, and mechanically remove each metal fence post along with the sturdy wooden corners that fence would easily stand for another 100 years.

Just so, America has built a shining city of freedom, opportunity and prosperity on a hill, but we have left the fences that surround it bitterly in place.

No amount of reading, or discussion will remove these fences of sin and separation. It will take effort and expense, we will have to finally share our inheritance with those brothers and sisters whose lash-scarred and bullet ridden bodies, and indomitable spirits helped build the nation in the first place.

It was my intention to deliver this message in 8 minute and 46 seconds, but there is one last thing I have to say.

Throughout this message I have emphasized that in order to remove the barriers that have stood so long we will actually have to do something and that it will actually cost us something. Dreading the effort and expense is what keeps us from action.

In this past week, a father and son team showed up at our property with their tractor, and we spent a joyous time working together for the final removal of the sheep fence. When their bill arrived on Friday the final cost was less than I had feared.

This year our church pledge drive will have a goal of an added 10% tithe to fund pandemic relief on Whidbey Island and I would not be surprised if we dedicated a portion of that amount to help dismantle racism in our country. It was dread of the effort and expense, and just plain inertia that kept Jan and I from removing the fence earlier, but I want to testify that the sheer joy in the final release was so worth it.

We can do this, and, WE, the followers of Jesus should be leading the WAY!

Glory to God in the highest and blessings of redemption and release to all the people of God here below. Amen.