

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, March April 3rd, Lent V
Isaiah 43:16-21 Psalm 126 Philippians 3:4b-14 John 12:1-8

Jesus says the poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

At a clergy day several years ago, there was a funeral director invited to speak. He said that a number of people had made prior arrangements in simplifying the arrangements with the idea of not burdening their children or family with exorbitant costs. When the family found out after the death they were upset. The arrangements did not do justice and show enough respect for their loved one. I think the family added to what had been decided in the prearrangement.

This speaks to the value of relationship the value family the values that each individual has in the community as a whole. This calls us to a sense of discernment about the priorities in our lives. It is without question; the poor are an ongoing priority in our lives in the quest for justice and peace. But there are times in our lives which call for special consideration. When a loved one has died or is approaching death it is understandable and expected that we pay attention and make them a priority in our lives.

In looking at the big picture, Jesus is right in that we will always have the poor. We will always have the rich as well. Both rich and poor are relative terms, and those of us here this morning would not call ourselves rich. But compared to people in other parts of the world we are rich. In other words, there will always be people richer than others and people who are poorer than others. That being said, we don't then just throw up our hands and say there will always be poor so there's nothing we can do about it.

It isn't about eliminating poverty per say but working towards a reality where all people have a certain standard of living where they have hope and not worrying about where their next meal is going to come from or whether they'll have a roof over their head for the night.

It's also not just about helping the poor by giving them money but helping them to have dignity and being able to provide for themselves and their families. It's that question or comment you've probably all heard which comes to mind. Give the man a fish but he has food for a day, teach a man to fish and he has food for the rest of his life.

But in this day and age, the metaphor of teaching a man to fish is only part of the way forward, it's also helping him to remove the barriers in place in society which prevents him from fishing. This means there are systemic issues which need to be addressed surrounding poverty and other social justice issues.

I keep coming back to the summary of the law, to love God with all your heart and soul mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. To do this means discernment and time management. There are short term and long-term goals. It is not as if Jesus was telling us to ignore the poor, but to set aside responding to the poor for the moment and focusing on a loved one about to die. Then going back to respond to the poor as a long-term goal.

We make choices all the time with what we do with our time and our money because they are limited, but it doesn't mean that our love and care is limited.

Do any of you have more than one child? When your first child was born you loved that child, and all your focus was on that child. When your second child was born, now your time and energy is divided, but did you love the first child any less because of the second child?

This means that we can love God and love our neighbor and love ourselves as well. I have said before that sometimes these three come together, but the reality is we often must choose which of the three we're going to focus on at any particular moment.

it reminds me the passage which is often read at funerals.
Ecclesiastes 3:1-9

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

²a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
³a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
⁸a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

In Isaiah we heard: *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

This suggests to me, Jesus offers us a new and creative way of being in community. That with the spirit of God we can be the instruments of hope for those in need and on the margins. Those in the wilderness and in the desert. God's spirit offering us strength and wisdom to be truly together in community.

As the mystic story goes; there was a man chopping wood with an axe and he was slower and slower as the axe was getting duller and duller, and a friend came to him and asked him why he didn't sharpen the ask. His response that he did not have time.

Is our time with God in Christ a waste of time or does it add to our understanding of others and ourselves and our relationship in the community? Giving us strength and wisdom?

Amen