

A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING  
*MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT*  
JUNE 12, 2016

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GOD OUR FRIEND, YOU NEVER CHANGE,  
YOU ARE ALWAYS HERE.  
WHEN WE ARE LONELY OR HELPLESS  
YOU WATCH OVER US.  
HEAR US,  
BE WITH US, AS YOU WERE WITH YOUR SON,  
ALONE ON HIS CROSS.  
MIGHTY GOD,  
STRONG, LOVING AND WISE,  
HELP US TO DEPEND UPON YOUR GOODNESS  
AND TO PLACE OUR TRUST IN YOUR SON.  
GOD OF UNCHANGEABLE POWER,  
OUR STRENGTH AT ALL TIMES;  
GUARD US FROM ALL DANGERS  
AND SUPPORT US IN ALL DIFFICULTIES  
THAT WE MAY LIVE VICTORIOUSLY NOW AND FOREVER;  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR.

TWO SHORT PARABLES OF THE LOST FROM THE GOSPEL FOR THIS DAY. THEY ARE THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP AND THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN. THE FIRST OF THESE IS THE BETTER KNOWN OF THE TWO. THIS IS BECAUSE MOST PEOPLE SUBCONSCIOUSLY IDENTIFY THE SHEPHERD, WHO LOST AND SEARCHED FOR HIS

SHEEP, AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD IN THE PASSAGE IN ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL WHICH FORMS THE GOSPEL FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER. THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO REASON FOR THIS. HE IS INTENDED TO BE NO MORE THAN AN ORDINARY SHEPHERD, JUST AS THE WOMAN WHO LOOKED FOR HER COIN IN THE OTHER PARABLE.

BOTH THE SHEPHERD AND THE HOUSEWIFE, WHEN THEY LOSE SOMETHING THEY OWN, DO NOT REMAIN CONTENT WITH WHAT THEY STILL HAVE-THE NINETY-NINE SHEEP IN THE FLOCK OR THE NINE COINS IN HER PURSE-BUT ARE DETERMINED AT ONCE TO DO ALL THAT THEY CAN TO FIND IT AGAIN. THEY DO THIS BECAUSE THE HUMAN INSTINCT OF POSSESSION LEADS THEM TO WANT EVERYTHING THAT BELONGS TO THEM, AND THEY REJOICE WHEN THEY FIND WHAT THEY HAD LOST. THE POINT OF THE PARABLE IS THAT GOD SHARES THIS SAME FEELING. ALL HUMAN SOULS ARE HIS PROPERTY, AND HE THEREFORE REJOICES WHENEVER THOSE THAT ARE LOST OR STRAYED RETURN TO HIM.

THERE IS NO FARCE WHATEVER IN EITHER PARABLE. THEY UNVEIL SOMETHING OF THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM IN FACTS WHICH ARE GENUINELY COMMONPLACE, BECAUSE THEY SHOW THEM AS ILLUSTRATING A UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE OF ORDER. THE SENSE OF OWNERSHIP IS A VERY PRIMITIVE ELEMENT IN MAN'S NATURE. IT DEVELOPS EARLY IN EVERY HUMAN CHILD. YET IN EVERY CHILD IT IS A TINY INSTANCE OF A LAW AND GREATEST IN THE UNIVERSE. IT INDICATES AND REFLECTS A RELATION WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN GOD HIMSELF AND HIS CREATION. AND THE JOY IN PROPERTY REGAINED HAS ITS ANALOGUE, ITS FULFILLMENT, ITS SOURCE, IN SOMETHING WHICH IS KNOWN IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY GHOST. AMEN

“LORD, THOU HAST HERE THY NINETY AND NINE;  
ARE THEY NOT ENOUGH FOR THEE?  
BUT THE SHEPHERD MADE ANSWER: “THIS OF MINE  
HAS WANDERED AWAY FROM ME;  
AND ALTHOUGH THE ROAD BE ROUGH AND STEEP  
I GO TO THE DESERT TO FIND MY SHEEP.”

“HUMBLE YOURSELVES THEREFORE, UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, SO THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU IN DUE TIME. CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM, BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU AND AFTER YOU HAVE SUFFERED FOR A LITTLE WHILE, THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO HAS CALLED YOU TO HIS ETERNAL GLORY IN CHRIST, WILL HIMSELF RESTORE, SUPPORT, STRENGTHEN AND ESTABLISH YOU.”

THESE WORDS FROM FIRST PETER ARE ELOQUENT IN THEIR SIMPLICITY, AND PROFOUND IN MEANING TO A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST. THEY ARE A WONDERFUL DESCRIPTION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND JESUS. MOST OF US TRY, BUT ARE NOT AS SUCCESSFUL AS WE'D LIKE TO BE TO REACH THIS LEVEL OF TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SAVIOUR AND GOD. LISTEN TO WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF US AND WHAT WE CAN EXPECT IN RETURN: “HUMBLE OURSELVES; CAST ALL OUR ANXIETY ON HIM; FACE AND ENDURE SUFFERING,” WHICH IN ONE TYPE OR ANOTHER IS COMMON TO ALL OF US. I'M NOT SUGGESTING ALL OF THESE ARE EASY TO ATTAIN, FOR TRY AS WE MAY OUR SUCCESS RATE IS NOT ONE HUNDRED PERCENT IN RETURN LISTEN TO WHAT GOD WILL DO FOR US. AS PETER SAID MOMENTS AGO, HE WILL RESTORE, SUPPORT, STRENGTHEN AND ESTABLISH US. WHY? BECAUSE HE CARES FOR US. OUR PATHWAY TO GOD, OUR RELATIONSHIP TO HIM IS NOT BLOCKED BY GOD FOR HE IS ALWAYS OPEN TO US. WE ARE SOMETIMES THE BARRIER DUE TO OUR MANY OTHER PRIORITIES, OUR ACTIVITIES, OUR WORK, PUTTING GOD ON THE BACK BURNER

UNTIL WE ARE IN NEED AND PERHAPS MOST OF ALL, OUR LACK OF HUMILITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS TO GOD AND OUR NEIGHBORS. THIS LACK OF HUMILITY IS A DEVASTATING TRAIT WHICH NEGATIVELY IMPACTS VIRTUALLY EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.

REMEMBER PETER'S WORDS..."HUMBLE YOURSELVES THEREFORE, UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD." AS I HAVE GROWN OLDER I HAVE LEARNED HOW MUCH I DO NOT KNOW. I HAVE LEARNED THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY PERSON WHO PURPORTS TO BE AN AUTHORITY ON EVERYTHING IS PROJECTING A FALLACY ON HIMSELF AND OTHERS. THOSE WHO ACT WITH SUCH ARROGANCE HAVE LOST OR IGNORED ONE OF LIFE'S BASIC TENETS...NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING. ALL OF US MUST BE ACTIVE AND GOOD LISTENERS: FIRST TO GOD, THEN TO OUR FAMILIES, OUR NEIGHBORS AND TO OURSELVES. TO DO OTHERWISE MEANS THAT HUMILITY HAS BEEN LOST AND WE HAVE NEGLECTED ONE OF GOD'S MOST IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS.

JOHN RUSKIN TELLS US; "I BELIEVE THE FIRST TEST OF ANY GREAT PERSON IS THEIR HUMILITY." JAMES BARRIE PUTS IT THIS WAY..."LIFE IS A LONG LESSON IN HUMILITY." HOW THEN DO WE PRACTICE REAL HUMILITY IN OUR LIVES? FIRST WE MUST UNDERSTAND ITS IMPORTANCE. PETER'S EPISTLE TELLS US THAT IT IS THE FOREMOST GRACE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. TRUE HUMILITY IS THE HIGHEST VIRTUE, MOTHER OF THEM ALL. BEING HUMBLE IS THEN A CORNERSTONE OF A SUCCESSFUL LIFE.

SECONDLY WE MUST LISTEN TO OTHERS ACTIVELY. THIRDLY, WE MUST TAKE TIME TO READ, STUDY AND PRAY UPON OUR GOOD QUALITIES...TO STRENGTHEN

THEM. AND OUR NOT SO GOOD TRAITS...TO CHANGE THEM. WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES, WHERE DOES HUMILITY FIT INTO MY LIFE AND DO I PRACTICE IT? IF WE DON'T, WE SHOULD ASK GOD FOR HELP IN DOING BETTER, FOR OUR GOD AND SAVIOUR ARE THE BEST EXAMPLES OF HUMILITY WE CAN FOLLOW. BUT LETS BE SURE TO UNDERSTAND THAT HUMILITY IS NOT SERVILITY. HUMILITY IS NOT MEEKNESS. IT IS IN FACT THE TRAIT THAT ALLOWS US TO COPE WITH MANY OF THE VAGARIES OF LIFE. IT IS INCORRECT TO BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD BE QUIET WHEN THINGS ARE HAPPENING WHICH WE FEEL ARE WRONG. THINK ABOUT IT. FAILURE TO SPEAK OUT ABOUT RACISM, WAR, GENOCIDE AND SO MANY OTHER TOPICS IS NOT REALLY HUMILITY, IT IS ESCAPISM. WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE AND HE CALLS UPON US TO SPEAK UP AS APPROPRIATE. SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPEAKERS AND GREATEST MINDS ARE HUMBLE, BUT THEIR WORDS AND ACTIONS HAVE CHANGED THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER. PEOPLE CAN AND SHOULD DISAGREE, IT IS HEALTHY AND NECESSARY AS LONG AS IT IS DONE THROUGH ACTIVE LISTENING, RESPECT AND PROPER TWO WAY COMMUNICATION. THAT IS...I LISTEN TO YOU AND YOU TO ME.

IN ACTS, WE HAVE A COMMISSION THAT DRIVES ALL CHRISTIANS EVERYWHERE. FROM ACTS: “ BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, IN JUDEA, SAMARIA AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.” WHILE THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN TO HIS DISCIPLES, IN REALITY THIS MESSAGE IS FOR ALL OF US. WE, IN A REAL SENSE, SPEAK FOR OUR LORD IN OUR WORLDLY SPHERE. AND AS WE DO SO, LET US SPEAK AND ACT AND LISTEN IN HUMILITY WHICH LEADS US TO OUR HUMBLE GOD AND BEYOND.

SPEAKING OF HUMILITY, WINSTON CHURCHILL SAID:

“I HAVE NEVER ACCEPTED WHAT MANY PEOPLE HAVE KINDLY SAID, NAMELY THAT I INSPIRED THE NATION. IT WAS THE NATION AND THE SURVIVAL DWELLING ALL ROUND THE GLOBE, THAT HAD THE LION HEART WHICH SAVED SO MANY COUNTRIES. I HAD THE LUCK TO BE CALLED UPON TO GIVE UP THE ROAR.” AND TO SHARE THE COMPASSION.