

## **Sermon - Margaret Mitchell**

**10 June 2018 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year B**

### **Relationship**

*Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for Yourself. Amen.*

I am aged and getting older, and the days, weeks, months and years of my life pass more quickly the older I get. It happens to the best of us doesn't it? It seems like just last week I was a young boy serving my master Eli in the temple. Do you remember that time? I was trying to sleep and kept hearing Eli call my name, but it wasn't Eli at all... it was God, and he had a plan for my life.

Now here I am in my later years... reflecting on my life and all that has passed. I have had a good life, I have two grown sons, Joel and Abijah, who I thought would follow in my footsteps, and learn from my leadership. I set them up as Judges of God's chosen people, the people of Israel, and assigned them duty in Beersheba. I have been Israel's Judge and leader for a good many years now, and tried to set an example to my boys. But I want to retire! I am getting old and tired and wanted them to take over from me, but they were such a disappointment!

They didn't take after me at all, and then I learned they were out for what they could get for themselves in their positions of power and authority - taking bribes, corrupting justice. It's no wonder the people didn't want them for their leaders. I know, It's a universal problem, but I pray it will change in the years to come.

Where did I go wrong in my parenting? I did my best with them, taught them morals and ethics, and right relationships. I taught them about God,

and how God is our one true leading light. But they went astray, and I really can't take on the guilt of their bad choices.

Now I have to take charge of the situation, and see what God wants to do with all this. I have a good relationship with God, I talk to him often, so I'll just offer this up to him in prayer and see what happens. That's what relationship is all about... talking and listening, doing what is right.

Oy Vey! The elders have gathered and want to talk to me... they tell me I'm an old man, and my sons aren't following in my footsteps (as if that's news to me!), and they want me to appoint a king to rule over them, just like the other nations around us have their own kings.

I am crushed, devastated! After all my years of service to this contrary nation, and God's faithfulness to them, this is their response! They want a king! This is awful! I must pray to God for an answer to this mess.

And you know what? God spoke to me saying: "Go ahead, do what they're asking. They are not rejecting you Samuel, they have rejected me as their King. From the day I brought them out of Egypt until this very day they've been behaving like this, leaving me for other gods. And now they're doing it to you. So let them have their own way. But warn them of what they're in for. Tell them the way kings operate, just what they're likely to get from a king."

So I told the elders, I delivered God's warning to these people who are asking me to give them a king. I told them what God had said to me, I told them the way the kind of king they're talking about operates. An earthly king, I said, will take your sons and make soldiers of them— driving and fighting in chariots, conscripted to the cavalry, and infantry, regimented in battalions and squadrons. An earthly king will put some to forced labour on his farms, plowing and harvesting, and others to making either weapons of war or chariots in which he can ride in luxury. He'll put your daughters to work as beauticians and waitresses and cooks. He'll

conscript your best fields, vineyards, and orchards and hand them over to his special friends. He'll tax your harvests and vintage to support his extensive bureaucracy.

Your prize workers and best animals he'll take for his own use. He'll lay a tax on your flocks and you'll end up no better than slaves. And then the day will come when you will cry in desperation because of this king you so much want for yourselves. And I told them, don't expect God to answer.

But would the people listen to me?

"No!" they said. "We will have a king to rule us! Then we'll be just like all the other nations. Our king will rule us and lead us and fight our battles."

Oh boy, the humanity of humans! The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence isn't it? Why do we covet what our neighbours have? Why do we always want what everybody else has? Why can't people be content with what they have? No, these obtuse people aren't listening to reason, aren't listening to God, they want change for changes sake, and I know, and God knows, they will come to regret it.

What can I do? I took in what the elders said and brought it to God, and God told me to do what they say. Make them a king.

So I dismissed the men of Israel and told them all to go home, each of them to their own city.

And then I did what God asked me to do, I made them a King. God led me to Saul and I anointed him, and Saul was their king for very many years.

The people of Israel will have many more kings in the next one thousand years before the scriptures are fulfilled and Jesus comes. One of those kings will be David and he will write such beautiful poetry, prose, songs of praise, psalms we will call them...

We heard one this morning a song of thanksgiving for all God has done for us, and continues to do each and every day, if we let him into our lives, follow his guidelines and allow God to work out his purpose of salvation in us and in the world. How can we do anything but give thanks for all God's goodness?

An old friend Eugene Peterson has a Message, he says: for the biblical way is not so much to present us with a moral code and tell us "Live up to this;" (or else), nor is it to set out a system of doctrine and say: "think like this and you will live well." The biblical way is to tell a story and invite us - "Live into this. This is what it looks like to be human; this is what is involved in entering and maturing as human beings."

We don't have to fit into prefabricated moral or mental or religious boxes before we are admitted into the company of God – that's the beauty, nature and grace of God – we are taken seriously just as we are and given a place in God's story, for it is, after all, God's story, none of us is the leading character in the story of our life. And no matter how obtuse, or wayward, or contrary we are, no matter the bad choices we make during our lifetime, God will continue to work his purpose out in our lives with His abundant grace.

And so, in my advancing years, I recall what Paul says to the people of Corinth: "what we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up... alive. Every detail works to our advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace.

Ah, there's the beauty of a life lived with God, the faith and hope that God is in charge, and though things may be difficult at times, though we may

be disappointed, let down, devastated by life events, by human frailties and just plain human interactions... when we do encounter difficult times, we can still see God's grace. When we come out the other side and look back, we see God's hand in it all.

And so we need to practice being thankful, practice giving glory to God for his grace, his blessing, which is given to us for the day, each and every day ... and we in turn give thanks for all we receive.

And I'm going to be honest with you... there will be times when we cannot make any sense of events in our lives, when our world and our thinking may be turned upside down.

Jesus often does this when he speaks, as he does in today's Gospel... Jesus turns things upside down, answers a question with a question in true rabbinic style, leaving us searching for an answer... and sometimes there is no answer. We hear and read the parables, which often are like riddles to us and we expend so much time and energy in trying to understand and find the meaning ... what is Jesus saying to us in this? We don't need to worry about the meaning, the answer. When we live with the question it becomes part of who we are, we grow into it, and every now and then an answer may arrive unexpectedly. Maybe there is no particular message to understand... maybe we are being challenged in a different way, to look at things differently, to be open to new possibilities, to rethink our position.

I must admit, I often don't understand Jesus and his ministry; it's hard for us to understand who Jesus is, what he does, and why he does what he does. Even the disciples who were with him every day for years, needed to have Jesus explain himself time and time again. We need to ask God what his will is for our lives. We need to ask God why he is doing what he is doing in our lives, and listen, really listen for God's answer. Maybe we are being challenged to consider our relationships: our relationship with God in Christ, our relationship with each other.

In the reading you heard from Mark today, Jesus' earthly family was concerned about his physical and mental health, but Jesus was more concerned about the spiritual health of the people around him, the people he encountered day by day. Jesus says true "family" is not a matter of biological relationship, but of kinship in obedience to God, and redraws the lines of family and belonging, saying those who do God's will are siblings and mother to him.

So even in my old age, I think I might be getting it... how about you? Relationship begins when God through his grace adopts us into God's family. In a world where there is so much opposition to the Christian faith, and where our homes and families demand so much of our time, our one priority is to love one another wherever we are, and with every breath of our being; that's what being in good relationship is all about.

Jesus said a kingdom divided is a kingdom which cannot stand ... and I think about the problem here at home in Ramah, amongst our people, and I thank God for his eternal presence, for God's faithfulness to all people, in all places and in all times. When we allow God's Holy Spirit in our lives, nothing can stop us. We have a power to overcome everything the devil throws in our way - even the opposition of members of our earthly family. That power is the awesome power of God! When we unite with fellow believers, the power is even greater.

And so I roll with the punches... I accept change, knowing God will work out his plan in me and in the world. And when God turns the ordinary upside down and inside out, the best I can do is to continue to be faithful – faithful to myself, faithful to my community, faithful to my God.

Thanks be to God.

All my relations.