

Homily
15th Sunday After Pentecost September 18th, 2022

Church of the Ascension

The Rev. Victoria Scott

Readings: [JEREMIAH 8:18-9:1](#); [PSALM 79:1-9](#); [1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7](#); [LUKE 16:1-13](#)

Three summers ago, I watched my family learn to surf. I watched them wobble – and fall – as they struggled to stay upright on the board as the waves propelled them toward the shore. I watched the shifting and adjusting that they had to do to find that balance.

Today's readings are about balance. Our lives, as Christians, are about balance. Balance means shifting and adjusting as we ride the wave of this life – this earthly journey. It means assessing and reassessing the different parts of our lives – revisiting and resetting our priorities – so that we can ride that wave to the fullest.

Sometimes we will find that we are out of balance between our heads and our hearts. Our hearts long for relationship and connection, while our heads often take us to a place of looking out for ourselves first, worried that no one else will take care of us so we'd better do it ourselves. This is destabilizing, and it makes us unsteady – wobbly – on that wave of life...

Brian McLaren interprets today's Gospel parable through this lens of head/heart imbalance. He reminds us of the imbalance in Roman imperialist society, when farmers were exploited by Roman authorities, expected to reap far more than was realistic from the land. This created crushing debt. The steward we hear about today – the unjust one – his job would have been to go and collect those crushing, unrealistic debts. Interpreting the parable through this lens of head/heart, the steward is resetting the equilibrium by "switching sides" and forgiving the debt on behalf of the landowner. This is a "heart" choice which focusses on relationship, than a "head" choice that is focusing solely on the monetary gain. Balance is restored for the debtors, and both the steward and the landowner are offered a reminder about priorities – and it's a reminder that balances head and heart.

Some of you might be thinking, that's fine, but all we need to think and feel about the troubling details in this parable? Is that all we need to say about the steward's dishonesty, his fraudulent behaviour? And what about the verse "You cannot serve God and wealth"? I love what Nadia Bolz-Weber says about parables. She says:

“Parables...aren’t to be studied and interpreted so much as to be experienced. We don’t figure them out; they figure us out.

A parable is like a living thing—a growing organism of meaning. Yeah, you can dissect it to try to understand it. But to do so is to kill it.”

I do think it’s worth wondering about wealth, and how we spend money, and we can sit with what happens in today’s story to see what it does to our equilibrium. Last week I shared Sam Well’s assertion that the whole point of universe is relationship. Think about what the steward did with money: he used it to build relationships. He forged relationships with the farmers.

Building a formula for ourselves out of the actions of the steward is what Nadia Bolz Weber would call killing this parable. However, the way that it points us to think about relationships is lifegiving. There is balance to be found in relationship with others. Relationships require us to shift and move and adjust with one another. There is also balance to be found in considering how we spend our money. Are our financial decisions made with both head and heart? Is relationship part of the equation in our decisions?

In our first reading, Jeremiah brings us profound lament. Have things changed at all since Jeremiah lamented the condition of humanity in this passage? He would still weep for us today, no doubt. Lament is part of the balance we are called to as Christians. There is much in this world that is cause for lament, for weeping, for despair. We are not meant to gloss over that lament in search of a way to replace it with praise, with rejoicing. We are meant to hold both praise and lament as we find a balance between our heads and our hearts in our humanity. We are meant to feel lament enough that it propels us into action – into action that seeks balance, and restores the equilibrium in our world.

When Randy and Annabel and Evan were first out on the ocean with their surfboards, they weren’t alone: they were with an instructor. The instructor had spoken to them on land, shown them some ways to find their balance. Then, he got right out there in the water with them. He held the surfboard for them as they waited for the right wave, and then he gave them a little push to give them the best chance of finding their balance as that wave rolled in.

We all need an instructor, and Paul’s Letter to Timothy reminds us who our instructor is as we surf the wave of life. It’s Jesus. Jesus, the Mediator. Jesus is the one who is there with us in the waters of life. Jesus is the one who reminds us over and over again not to get too caught up in our heads, but also to live with and from our hearts. Jesus reminds us to find that balance, and he asks us to restore the equilibrium within ourselves and in our world with our actions.

Finding our equilibrium is not a single event. It’s a lifelong process. I talked about strings in life a few weeks ago, contrasting strings of power and control,

ego, or self-centeredness with heartstrings of compassion and love. These strings are also about balance. If we let it, power and control can pull us way off balance in life. The beautiful thing about this Christian faith of ours is that God is always inviting us to find that balance again. When Randy and Annabel and Evan were on those surfboards, finding balance wasn't about bold, exaggerated movements. It was about gently adjusting, and moving with the wave...

We all need help with this balancing. We need to adjust and readjust as we surf the waves of this earthly journey. This place is a safe place, a good place, a blessed place, to do that adjusting and readjusting. This is a place where we can restore the equilibrium between head and heart within ourselves. This is a place where we can wade the challenging waters together. Where we can remind each other that Jesus is swimming through this life with us. Feel yourself adjusting and readjusting here, now. If the waves of lament, of fear, of uncertainty feel rough, know that you are not alone in that. May we all leave here feeling steadier and may that create fresh resolve in us all to look for ways to restore balance in the world this week, in actions, in relationships, with our heads, and our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.