



Hear and Understand

July 13, 2014

Thought For The Week

Scriptures: Zechariah 9: 9-10 •
Romans 8: 9, 11-13 • Matthew 11: 25-30

Let me begin with a confession; over my long history (55 yrs) of being a minister, pastor and preacher, I didn't give much thought about all the good people of God who were sitting in the pews waiting for a good word, a word of encouragement, even perhaps a word of correction when it was necessary. More often than not, I worried more about the words of the sermon or the fear that I might say something contrary to the doctrines of the church.

It seldom occurred to me that a significant number of people out there in the pews were really not all that much interested in my well-prepared rhetoric, my fine diction, clever metaphors & lighthearted comments. It never occurred to me that at least a number of people came to church that day, deeply distracted, maybe even troubled, by events in the world around them: the parent(s) of a young child, lying in bed at home. They could care less about church. A father with two small children in hand but without a mother to tend them, they were recently divorced. The elderly, couple helping each other get through the door and into the pew, were possibly without any help in this, the closing days of their lives. The young children sitting there, restlessly asking for raisins or crackers had little or no interest in what I was saying. The gay person, sitting near the back may have been wondering whether they should be in church at all. In short, it seldom occurred to me during those many years that several of the people out there; were hoping to find some solace from the terrors of the world from which they just came. Nonetheless, I usually kept right on preaching, hardly ever reflecting on the stressful elements of life that these good folks had brought with them.

Happily, I have come to my senses in more recent times and have given much thought to the lives, happy or stressed out, of the people waiting for a good word from the pastor.

These thoughts came to mind as I read a selection from the gospel of Matthew for last Sunday. "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The insight I draw from these words of Jesus is that he always seemed to know how to preach to the situation and to the people who were listening to him. In this instance, he obviously knew the conditions of the overburdened people waiting to hear the meaning of the good news of God's Kingdom. You heard no word of protest in their regard, no harsh criticism. Instead, he addressed them as good people who struggled every day to maintain some semblance of hope, even joy in the midst of Roman power and the endless rules of the Jewish hierarchy.

On the other hand, Jesus could also speak in the strongest critical language to the scribes and Pharisees who laid heavy religious burdens on people and seldom lifted a finger to lighten them. To those individuals he could speak in the harshest terms, "brood of vipers, white-washed tombs, hypocrites.

The point of this comparison is that Jesus knew his audience: to many he could speak as a compassionate teacher with a humble heart, but to the arrogant and the proud, the self-satisfied, the publically-pious he could speak in the harshest critical terms.

It occurs to me to say, therefore, that the preacher who speaks to the people of God gathered for worship on a Sunday, such a person should be aware that there is a rich mixture of people sitting in front of him/her. Some may be happily satisfied with life; others may need the word of a humble pastor, others may need an occasional word of correction from the same pastor.

In the end, however, my preference falls on the side of the many who come to church bringing with them life's sorrows and sadness's and have simply come to hear a word of encouragement that will help them return to that world without giving up hope. It took me a while to learn all that. Fortunately, I still have a few years in which to catch up and learn to preach as Jesus did.



This Weeks Prayer for Peace

United Kingdom

O God, you are the way of peace. Come into the brokenness of our lives and our lands with your healing love.

Help us to understand your will and to bow to one another in true forgiveness. By the fire of the Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice, which separate us.

Be with the people of the United Kingdom. Fill them and us, O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out fear and binds us together in Divine unity.

We thank you and praise you for Christ's message of peace, for love that sustains us, for wisdom that directs us, and for desire that beckons us toward peace in our world.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.



Stewardship Thought For The Week

Some of you are enjoying the seasonal opportunity to entertain and have a Summer Bar BQ with your friends. It is a time to fix special meals that you and others may enjoy. Many churches have special services that are often followed with "dinner on the grounds" where the favorite dishes (pot luck) from all are shared and enjoyed.

The Gospel writers tell us about a special dinner "in Jesus' honor" (John 12:2, NIV). The food was good, I'm sure, but what made the occasion special was something unusual that happened. Mary, one of the hosts, poured "expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3, NIV). Now the disciples objected and thought it wasteful, but Jesus replied, "Leave her alone" (John 12:7, NIV).

Have you ever asked yourself, why? Why did she do this? Why did Jesus give His approval? Could it be that He knew that this represented *her desire to give Him her very best*.

Consider that her purpose was not to make a scene but simply to express her devotion to Christ. The time is always right when we commit our best to the Lord Jesus.

Will you give your very best to the One who gave all for you?