

October 7, 2012

Both our readings today are about 'providence' which, in this case, is a theological term not a city in Rhode Island! Providence means the things God does to create or sustain God's world and people, then we become God's partners in the work of providence. Worldwide Communion Sunday reminds us that we are called to care for the whole creation and all creatures on it.

Psalm 126: 1-6

This Psalm is a lament, a kind of complaint of the whole community, addressed to God. Scholars think it comes from the time just after the Israelites returned from their Exile in Babylon. They are happy to be home but fear their fields will not feed them. This passage calls God to take care of his people, as God has done in the past. It is often recited as a grace before a meal on the Sabbath or on festival days by Jews today.

¹It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when GOD returned Zion's exiles.

²We laughed, we sang, we couldn't believe our good fortune. We were the talk of the nations — "GOD was wonderful to them!"

³GOD *was* wonderful to us; we are one happy people.

⁴And now, GOD, do it again — bring rains to our drought-stricken lives

⁵So those who planted their crops in despair will shout hurrahs at the harvest,

⁶So those who went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

Matthew 6: 25-33

This passage forms the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mountain which contained lots of advice on how God wishes us to live. Here Jesus is discouraging worry because it denies God's providence that is apparent all around us. It is, at its heart, a call to social justice. To do what God would do – care for the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged. To practice hospitality and charity is within our grasp and we must do it!

²⁵^If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. ²⁶Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

²⁷^Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? ²⁸All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, ²⁹but have you ever seen color and design quite

like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

³⁰“If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? ³¹What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. ³²People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. ³³Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

Sermon – “Celebrating what really matter.”

What strikes me about the Psalm is even though it is a lament which means it’s asking God to fix something - undergirding the complaint is the absolute, unwavering trust that God, indeed, will fix it!!

God has the power to change the way things are is because one is able to face the future with hope.

This is likely the thinking behind Jesus’ closing words in the Sermon on the Mountain.

Douglas Hare suggests in his commentary (Matthew, Interpretation) that Jesus is addressing his disciples who have given up all their worldly goods and the security of job and home to follow him -> they have made themselves totally dependent on the hospitality and charity of others.

Jesus, with his words, reminds his disciples and all others who find themselves at risk, that God loves them!

In the Jerome commentary of Matthew, the author says that the highest valued work is that which brings about the Kingdom of God.

“The justice envisaged is not a justice in God alone but one that we are to produce on earth ourselves.”

We are not to worry but instead be inspired by the obvious acts of God’s providential love is evidence of God’s caring for Creation that is all around us.

Ben Farley writes about “providence” is the Westminster Handbook of Reformed Theology that we, as believers, are to respond to God’s obvious good works in our lives by then sharing in the “providential ordering of the world.”

Let me read you a recent email from Jesse Sage and show you some pictures.

Greetings Sharon,

So good to hear from you. I am a little out of touch with developments in SA, but I do keep in touch with the school. I was there in February and I shall be going again this coming Feb. As you know the school was transferred to the Eastern Cape Department of Education before we left – with a huge celebration in the presence of the State Premier and Archbishop of Capetown and many hundreds of well-wishers. Since then all has continued with a few setbacks – including the bankruptcy of the Education Department!! Thankfully the National Government Education Department stepped in, and now all is back on an even keel.

The Pre-school remains a success story and many thousands of children have now gone through this school en route to the Primary school and further education.

From recent news sent to us, the playground swings (which I built and repaired several times) has finally disintegrated and the shading which is needed in the heat of summer was totally destroyed in a gale. Security also remains a problem and our equipment is a target for thieves. We have this matter in hand with a generous donation from Matt Murray, an English star football player, which will construct a house for the school caretaker on site. I think the library will need re-stocking. Xhosa is predominantly a spoken language, and the reading and care of books for many is a new experience, so that is important and which I hope to check in February.

I will attach a few photos – including one of two from the celebration with Archbishop Thabo and the Premier when the completed school was finally transferred to the Eastern Cape two years ago... including one of some staff doing some African dancing at the transfer celebration. And a couple taken recently of the shading ripped off in the gale and the disintegrated playground swings. Come back to me if you want more.

Love to you all
Jesse

Here is what we need to remember:

When the people of Mzamowethu pre-school encounter a need, challenge, disappointment -> they pray.

- They pray that they will have the resources to meet the incredible need before them.
- They trust that their prayers will be heard because they have experience from the past that this is true.
- They trust that others will be determined to do God's work in the world – THAT'S US!! And that we will help them continue their work.

So a cheque has been sent to help repair/replace the play structure in Gonubie SA.

Food donated today will help feed clients of West Broadway Community Ministries.

Turkeys and prizes will be delivered to Rainbow Ministries so that the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people and their families will have a community Thanksgiving dinner.

And we'll go to our families with food, time, thanks, love and much gratitude for how good God has been to us and how blessed we are to be able to help others know the power of God who acts around the world every moment.