DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING?

OUR LAST GATHERING

The last time you and I gathered, the Neu Waves Youth Ministry Team asked us to be disciples with a mission - disciples who freely identify with Jesus and share His feelings, His thoughts, and His actions.

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Here we are 4 weeks later. Has anything changed? Do we know where we’re headed? Do our lives demonstrate discipleship of Jesus Christ?

THE INTERVIEW WITH OUR POPE

Ever since his election, Pope Francis has been asking us just that. On Thursday, a candid and in-depth interview with the Pope was released to the public. I urge you to set aside time to pray over his thoughts. You can read it in the September issue of the Catholic magazine, America, or click on this link... http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview.

A PAPAL RE-DIRECT

And when you do, you’ll find that many organizations quickly twisted or exaggerated our Pope’s words to suit their agendas. Nevertheless, our Holy Father makes it clear he wants a less judgmental church. His senior communications adviser put it this way: “We've spent a lot of time talking about the boundaries. We've spent a lot of time talking about what is sin and what's not. Now let's move on. Let's talk about mercy. Let's talk about love.”

BREAKING OPEN SCRIPTURE

So keeping in mind the Pope’s call to a faith journey, let’s break open today’s readings and see where the sacred and eternal words of God lead us in exploring our own journeys of discipleship.
AMOS DENOUNCES THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RICH

First stop: 750 years before the birth of Jesus. The prophet Amos is rebelling against a consumerist, profit-centered society. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Well before we join with Amos and start revolting, please consider the following. Amos is NOT promoting a political agenda, nor is he sympathizing with those naively dreaming that their society can return to the ancient morality of the nomad. Amos is quite eloquently denouncing the hypocrisy of their worship life.

Yesterday like today, he’s calling out not so much those who live luxurious lifestyles but those who live luxurious lifestyles at the expense and neglect of the poor and needy.

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

Yesterday like today, we can find stories of people misusing funds or committing forgery. This leads us to our second stop on our journey through Scripture, our Gospel reading the Parable of the Unjust Steward.

A rich man hears that his steward is squandering his money. The rich man fires the steward. Before he leaves his job, however, the steward reduces the debts of every one of his master’s debtors, apparently cheating his ex-boss out of what the people owe him. The rich man then commends the steward. Wait a minute. Did I just say that the rich man commends the steward?

WHAT THE PARABLE ISN’T SAYING

Now I need to be up front about this parable. Theologians and interpreters have struggled with it for hundreds of years. No matter the difficulties, all of them agree this parable is NOT encouraging us to swindle people so that we can get into White House parties! So with that disclaimer in hand, let’s press on!

WHY THE STEWARD IS COMMENDED IS NOT IMPORTANT

Perhaps the rich man is commending the steward for selfishly securing his future by ensuring that the debtors are at his mercy. Or maybe the rich man, like the father of the Prodigal Son, is surprising us by honestly praising the steward. We really don’t know and frankly, it really isn’t critical to the parable.
UNLOCKING THE PARABLE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AMOS
What I believe is important to us today is unlocking Jesus’ parable from the perspective of Amos’ call to the enslavers of the poor. Here’s verse 9 again:

I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth,
so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

A DEATH-DEALING INITIAL REACTION?
What are our first thoughts as we hear these words of Jesus? Do we immediately focus on “dishonest wealth” and proceed from there to death-dealing judgment of the steward, or maybe the rich man, for their apparent greed or deception?

A LIFE-GIVING FOCUS
Taking a cue from Pope Francis, let’s focus instead on the word “friend,” and focus on it from the perspective of the needy, the ones who had their debts lowered.

FRIENDSHIP
I think we can all agree friendship does NOT involve indebtedness or enslavement. True “friendship involves commonality and equality.” The Norwegian theologian Halvor Moxnes reasons therefore that the steward’s making of friends using dishonest money has the opposite effect of enslaving people in need. To ‘make friends’ by giving to those in need in fact has a liberating effect. It means putting people on the same footing.

If this understanding already has us thinking that the theologian is wacked out, or maybe that I’m crazy, well the word judgmental again comes to mind.

LUKE’S BANQUET SCENE
You see Jesus’ teaching within this parable is parallel to his message in the banquet scene of Luke Chapter 14. Here’s a refresher on the story: Jesus is invited to dinner. Jesus admonishes his host, a Pharisee, for inviting only his friends, relatives, and rich neighbors who can repay their obligation. Jesus boldly calls out his host in front of all gathered around table,

When you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;
blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.
For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.³

SHARE YOUR WEALTH AND LIVE FOREVER

Brothers and sisters, the only way to use money profitably is by sharing your wealth with those who need it to live. We do this through actions of almsgiving and caring social justice in subsidiarity with the poor and needy. We must be as creative in being good as the steward is creative in being bad.

Go therefore, and enter into life-giving relationships with the poor that will last for all eternity.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Share the love of Christ Jesus with your our neighbor, and in so doing, experience some of that absolute fullness of life that God intends for us.

LET LOVE IN

Today Pope Francis is reintroducing us to what it means to be disciples of Christ. Our Holy Father, successor to Peter, is asking us, no pleading with us, to tear down the walls we’ve built around our doctrine and let love in.

A REFOCUSED CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Let us approach this table united in the call to discipleship, to reaching out to those who have been hurt, excluded, or have fallen away, knowing that "being a Catholic doesn't mean having to choose between doctrine and charity, between truth and love. It includes both.”⁴


³ Luke 14:12-14

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