

Bible Study
Pentecost 5, Proper 9, Year A
July 9, 2017

[RCL] **Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45: 11-18; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Abraham's servant was given a difficult task—to go out and find a wife for his master's son, Isaac. Abraham must have trusted his servant immensely to give him such an important and life-altering assignment. The servant, however, did not trust his own intuition or discernment to complete the task assigned to him, but, instead, turned to the God of his master Abraham for guidance. He prayed, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going!" (Gen. 24:42). We know from the end of this story that the servant's prayer made all the difference! How often do we begin our day overwhelmed by the things and tasks that have been assigned to us? How often do we wonder how we will make the right decisions or accomplish all that has been entrusted to us? Perhaps we can learn a lesson from this unnamed servant, who had the wisdom to place his trust in God and ask that God would make successful the way before him.

- Do you begin your day with prayer? If not, why not?
- Do you include God in all of your daily decisions or do you only pray when you have a major decision to make?
- What could change about your life if you included God in even your most mundane daily decisions?

Psalm 45:11-18

Marriage, like all relationships we enter into, changes all parties involved. We enter as individuals and are joined together by covenantal promises to one another. We are no longer responsible only for ourselves—our wants and our desires, but are now willfully entangled with and responsible for the wants and desires of our partner. Successful relationships require both sacrifice and compromise for the happiness and fulfillment of all involved. These are the relationships that stand the test of time, that persist and become the stories our children and grandchildren share. Like the princess and the king, whose name is to be remembered from one generation to another (Psalm 45:18).

- What are some successful relationships you have witnessed that give you hope?
- Successful relationships often require both sacrifice and compromise. What type of things have you had to sacrifice or compromise in order to have a relationship with God?
- Have those sacrifices and compromises helped or hindered your growth as a person?

Romans 7:15-25a

If I'm honest, I'm terrible at keeping my New Year's resolutions. At the beginning of each year, I'm always so hopeful in preparing a list of all of the great changes I'm about to make in my life. But more often than not, I'm unable to successfully maintain those resolutions even through the month of January. It's not that I don't want to make the changes or that I don't believe the changes would ultimately be better for me. In fact, it is just the opposite! So I can relate to Paul when he states, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). So what hope is there for a person like myself, who lacks the self-control or self-discipline to accomplish even the simplest of positive changes in their own life? Paul answers by asking, "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). The answer is clear—our only hope is in Jesus, who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Thanks be to God!

- What New Year's resolutions did you make this year? How many are you still keeping?
- In what way has God extended grace to you in your own life?
- How can we extend that same grace to others in our life whom we might have held to a standard that they could never successfully meet?

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

There is an old saying: Hindsight is 20/20. Or, to put it more simply, the benefit or effectiveness of our actions can be most clearly seen and considered after we have already done them. In this way, many of the spiritual practices we take part in don't seem to make a lot of sense in the moment. Sometimes I'd rather sleep in on Sunday morning than wake up early, get dressed, and go to church. Other times I'd prefer doing something for myself to giving up my day to participate in an outreach project or community event. It's so easy to convince ourselves that our point of view in the present moment is the most accurate one, yet most often, it isn't until we are past our own selfish desires and emotions of the present moment that we are able to see our actions most clearly. The author of Matthew affirms this, saying, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Often, the burdens that seem inconvenient and most heavy are the very things we are being called to by God, who has promised us both wisdom and rest.

- Have you ever attempted a difficult activity, but were thankful for it after accomplishing it?
- If you are avoiding doing or participating in something currently, what is stopping you? What are you afraid of?

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