

Sermon by Rev. Michael J. Hoyt  
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church  
32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time  
November 11, 2001

**Living into God's Future**

Luke 20.27-38; II Thessalonians 2.1-5, 13-17

Next Sunday is Renewal of Hope Sunday  
here at Glenshaw Presbyterian Church  
when we make our commitments to share the hope God's of good news  
by investing our time, talents, and treasures  
in the work that God is doing in our community of faith.

That means this Sunday is the Sunday you traditionally would expect to hear  
a sermon on Stewardship.

Of course,  
since we've been reading from the Gospel of Luke in the lectionary this year, and since one  
of Luke's favorite subjects is "money",  
you've been hearing a lot of sermons in recent months  
that could be called Stewardship sermons.

I have to admit my own discomfort at setting out to preach  
a sermon on Stewardship,  
since I basically agree with my Old Testament professor Sib Towner  
who said that if you take all the people  
who are listening to Stewardship sermons this month  
and lay them down end to end...  
...they'd all be a lot more comfortable.

Also, as a lectionary preacher, I tend not to be in favor of starting with a topic  
and then looking for a scripture to prove my point.

Too often, Stewardship sermons are infused with the preacher's anxieties  
whether they dwell primarily in the preacher's own heart  
or in the hearts of those who watch and manage the church budget.

So, all that being said,  
today's "Stewardship Sermon" will arise from the lectionary texts for the day.  
What do we learn about how to be the church  
when we submit ourselves to these strange texts  
these odd words about an "age to come"  
an age that will be inaugurated by  
"the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"?

What do we learn from these text about  
how we should invest ourselves  
in God's work.

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At first I thought  
that of all the passages about money and wealth  
that could have shown up on this day

this passage from Luke has least of all to do with Stewardship.

But after living with this scripture for a while, I am beginning to see  
it has everything to do with Stewardship.

We encounter Jesus today as he is being confronted by some Sadducees.  
Now, the Sadducees were high-order priests,  
high-level community leaders who sat on the ruling council  
called the Sanhedrin.

These Jewish elites, by Jesus' day, had adopted much of the Greek culture,  
and they liked to cozy up with the Romans  
and thus enjoy the benefits of imperial political power.

The Sadducees also taught – in opposition to the Pharisees –  
that there is no resurrection.

All of the Jews had long believed that so long as Israel obeyed the law  
then God would rule over them  
and reward the righteous  
and punish the wicked  
in this life.

Belief in the resurrection, on the other hand, which arose late in Judaism,  
was linked to beliefs that  
the present age was held in the grip of dark powers,  
so that in this life the righteous would suffer,  
but that one day, on the Day of the Lord,  
God would vindicate them.

Those who have died will be raised  
so that they too can receive their due rewards (Dan. 12:2).

To reject belief in the resurrection as the Sadducees did  
and not to believe in demonic powers  
who controlled this world in the present age,  
was then also to reject the belief that this present age  
was radically corrupted, beyond the hope of human progress.  
Sadducees believed that Jews had plenty of free will to influence their destiny;  
so long as they obeyed the Law and repented of their sin  
then all would be well.<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, the Sadducees faith was entirely this-worldly  
and very rational –  
there was no outlandish element that looked beyond the realm of history  
to some future age in which God would conquer evil powers  
and bring salvation by doing something utterly new.

Now, the faith of the Sadducees is not a bad kind of faith to have,  
so long as your world remains relatively stable,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 668

and your suffering is not too intense,  
and so long as you have a strong belief in the  
“progress of the human race”  
like the mantra with which the optimistic industrialists began the 20<sup>th</sup> century,  
“Every day in every way, we’re getting better and better.”  
up until the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, that mantra was perhaps believable.

If, however, you are not a power elite,  
if you are not insulated from the suffering of life in this world  
if you sometimes look at the human race  
and wonder how we’ve managed to stay alive as long as we have,  
if the wars, and police actions, and bombing campaigns  
of this past century of “progress”  
make you question how much progress we’re actually making,  
and if the track record of terror and human crisis so far in this century  
has you asking the same,  
then perhaps you are one of those for whom Jesus came to town.

Jesus came announcing news that may sound good to you:  
that this age in which we live and die  
is not yet the kingdom of God;  
but that the age to come is the age in which no one will die,  
the age in which death is defeated  
and all our categories, and understandings will be transformed  
and where every human being will belong to one family  
as the children of God.

Jesus came announcing that the age of the kingdom of God is near,  
it is at hand;  
so open your eyes, and be awake and alert  
because in the most unlikely, unsuspecting moments  
God’s future kingdom breaks into our present age  
and calls us forward in hope.

This passage in Luke, though it talks a lot about marriage,  
is not primarily about marriage  
though the Sadducees would like it to be.

It is about living in one age  
while knowing that, in truth, you belong to the age to come.

The Sadducees seek to comprehend – and even control – the age to come  
using the categories and understandings of this age.

But the age to come – the age of resurrection –  
shatters the categories of this age in order to make room  
for something entirely new.

That is why we speak of the mystery of the gospel –  
good news that cannot be rationally explained or fully grasped  
but only hinted at, only glimpsed as in a mirror, darkly,  
glimpsed in a strange text about a rabbi in Galilee  
whose teaching eventually gets him crucified for sedition.

The text from 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians about the same thing.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians is a letter addressed to a community of faith  
that is awake and looking forward  
to the age to come  
Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to remember what he taught them  
about the time to come,  
and to hold on to the “traditions” of good news which will sustain them  
as they wait for the coming day of the Lord.  
The Thessalonian Christians keep the good news tradition  
not only for themselves,  
but so that they can offer comfort and hope  
to a world that is torn apart by evil powers,  
powers that declare themselves to be God.  
The good news is that the day will come when God will reveal the truth  
about all the pretenders to the throne of heaven.  
On the day of the Lord, every false god, every lesser power, will be exposed  
and the glory of Christ will be fully revealed.

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So, in this season of stewardship,  
when the future of the cosmos seems to depend on  
the balancing of our church budget,  
what do these texts have to say to us?

How do these texts shape our stewardship?  
What do they say to us as people who are in the habit –  
or perhaps not in the habit – of giving money to the work of the church?

First, they suggest that we are but participants in the work of salvation  
that God is doing;  
that whatever we do or whatever we give  
is not the beginning of the work  
but a response to God’s work already begun.

But more than this,  
these texts provide the very foundation for our stewardship;  
these words about the age to come are our reason for engaging in a practice  
that from any worldly, rational point of view is,  
at best, an effort in futility,  
and at worst an act of delusion.

These ancient and strange texts announce God’s future.  
They announce that God’s future is beyond all that we can comprehend  
beyond anything we, in our limited strength and wisdom,  
could ever construct or pay for on our own.

God’s future is a kingdom that can be...  
...heard in the prophetic voice that cries out in the wilderness,  
...glimpsed in the straight body of a man just healed from his paralysis,

or in the wonder-struck face of a child  
or in the relief of the city prostitute who hears that she is forgiven  
and restored to God's favor.

God's future is a age of good news to the economically trapped,  
of release to the refugee and the prisoner of war  
recovery of a sanity for the image-driven consumer  
and an age of freedom for anyone who lives their life  
under the oppression  
of forces and pressures beyond their control.

God's future is the foundation of every act of stewardship.  
If we simply give our time and our money to maintain an institution  
then we are fools.

If we simply give our money to repair old buildings, or to maintain a payroll,  
or to buy more books, more supplies, more electricity, more windows,  
then our good sense ought to be questioned.

But this is not really why we give to the church.  
We give because we believe that these announcements of God's future  
are the truth.

We give as an act of trust  
that God has acted in Jesus Christ to save the world,  
as an act of hope  
that God's salvation will be fully accomplished.

We give as a witness to God's future.

And in our practice of giving –  
week in and week out,  
one envelope at a time,  
one passing of the plate after another  
singing the doxology  
and praying our prayers of thanksgiving and dedication –  
in our ongoing practice of giving  
we are living out our hope.

By giving our time, our money, our energy to God's community  
we are denying ourselves the use of our full capacity  
for embracing this age,  
and instead we are reaching up, reaching out, reaching forward in hope  
to embrace the age to come,  
the age of God's kingdom,  
the age of God's victory.

When we practice stewardship we are living into God's future.

As to how much you give to the church,  
let me just say that if you're going to believe in resurrection  
if you're going to live as one who anticipate God's future  
it's going to make a difference in the way you live your life;  
an actual daily difference –  
I don't just mean you'll be a nice person

with a smile on your face and a warm feeling in your heart.  
You'll be a person who chooses differently,  
spends differently,  
saves differently,  
a person who can afford to live with less in this age  
because you cannot afford, and the world cannot afford  
to miss out of on God's future.

When we practice stewardship,  
we are throwing our lot in with those who say "yes" to resurrection,  
those who stand firm on God's pledge to the world in Jesus Christ  
that this world is not all there is,  
but that God's good and perfect purpose  
is being worked out  
and will one day come to pass.

I invite you to make a decision in the coming week  
to share in the hope of God's future.

Amen.