

***“Things are not what they seem”***

*A homily by The Rev. Sb. AJ Jonah Buckley  
for St. Martin’s Episcopal Church  
Lebanon, OR  
Proper 20A, Track 2*

*“Things are not what they seem  
as we stand at the edge of the world”  
-Spill Canvas, Self Conclusion*

This is one of those passages where things are not what they seem. We’re at the edge of what we have come to know and believe, and the way forward isn’t what we’d expect, imagine, or honestly necessarily even WANT. We have Jonah bemoaning that God is NOT destroying a city....we have workers all getting paid the same regardless of when they started work....and a plea from Paul to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. And, I can’t help but hear the cry of thousands saying “but, it’s not FAIR.”

And, let me be clear, God is just, God is righteous, God is loving, and compassionate but one thing God is not is fair, and thanks be we have grace from God, that it’s not a matter of whether we’ve earned it or “deserve” it or such things as our culture would have us do. God’s not fair and I think, like Jonah, we get angry about that. God asks Jonah the question, “is it right for you to be angry?” And that’s something I’ve been pondering all week.

Honestly, these passages left me with more questions than answers. Is there such a thing as righteous anger? How do we use our anger to build relationships? How do we use our rage to bring liberation? How do we stop our anger from leading us to feel overwhelmed and stuck, from wanting to throw up our hands and give up, like Jonah? Where does anger fit into living a life in “a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”?

And what follows is more of a rant than anything else...

**Disclaimer:** This rant is not directed at you fine folks. As I’ve come to know you, I’ve learned that y’all have big hearts, and care deeply for others, and put that into action through all your care for the poor. It’s more about the dangerous attitude that I have seen, especially on social media, when it comes to how we treat the homeless and working poor, and how it connects to Jonah and the vineyard worker’s frustrations, too. I think we need to be aware of these attitudes so we can better love our neighbor. And with that....

*<begin rant>*

So, Jonah.  
I can relate to Jonah if I’m being honest.  
I’ve been Jonah. Jonah is a bit of an emo kid. No lie.  
Like hair over the eyes, always looking sad,  
ever the victim, kind of emo.  
Like self-centered, blasts “Deathcab for Cutie” on his stereo  
and cries because his cheerios got too soggy...emo.

The kinda person you feel sorry for at first, but later get tired of their constant complaining. No hate, just painting a picture.

Case in point: twice in this passage he says he'd rather die than live.... which seems a bit over-the-top. I mean, the first time he says it because.... God is NOT destroying Nineveh. Wait...Jonah would rather die than live... because God decides at the last minute NOT to destroy an entire people and their village.  
..so now Jonah wishes to die.

Harsh, right?

And, if you still don't believe me, he says again that he'd rather die than live, after God sends a worm to destroy the bush he's been using for shade. The dude just had a near-death experience, he was swallowed by a giant FISH, But now....he'd throw that second chance away...because God acts with mercy and compassion. Say what?!?!?! The bush is destroyed. People are saved. It's a miracle you're alive. Is it right for you to be angry?

There's so much about this account that's backwards. Shouldn't it be Jonah that's about to destroy the city, and God stopping him? I mean, the elephant in the room is that... this story has God about to destroy an entire city. That's not the vision of the God of love that we are used to hearing about in Church. I think Jonah should be calling God to the carpet for even THINKING about destroying a whole city, not for saving the city.

That's what he should be angry about. That's what he should be up in arms about. But, no....he's so self-absorbed that he doesn't have a bush to shade him, and that he had to travel all this way, for no reason, that he's angry about that. Priorities, man. Is it right for you to be angry?

And, then...oh, man, this REALLY steams my broccoli. Like really, really, really, really steams it. The landowner takes mercy upon these workers, asking them all to work in his field, so that they can remain honored, even in their poverty, and they are paid GENEROUSLY. All of them. And, those that came earlier in the day, are pissed because the landowner paid everyone the same.

I hear attitude in the landowner's voice, like a parent asking a teenager, "are you serious?!?!?!? You're envious that I'm being generous?!?!? Are you for real?!?!? Seriously, the proper response is gratitude, not jealousy. But, you see, the workers have put value where God doesn't put value. They have put value in money and hours of work. They have put value in "fairness." They have put value in selfishness. They have put value in pride. In jealousy, and inequality. And they dare to cry out that it's not fair, that it's unjust, that the folks that came late don't deserve to eat, to support their family. Ah, helllllll no. That's not what God puts value in. This whole idea of "deserving or not" That's man-made. That's not of God. That's a product of a capitalistic culture. This IDEA of deserving only works within the framework of reward/punishment. That's not what's up.

Just.....no.

This idea of deserving, of being entitled to more, of it being okay for some to have way more at the expense of others.. is not okay.

Folks at this time understood that goods are limited.

It's like ordering a pizza. There are 8 slices, and 8 people. So everyone gets a slice.

But if one person takes two slices...Then someone else goes without.

That's the kind of thing that Jesus is saying is not okay.

Because it's not. Not in any way. It is not right for some to live in excess, while others starve. There are enough houses that are vacant

that every homeless person...could have SIX houses.

But, instead....cities are putting spikes on benches,

To take away even benches as a place to lay their heads...

There is SO much wrong with that.

That's not mercy. That's not generosity.

That's selfishness; it's heartless.

I don't know if y'all have seen all the conversations about the minimum wage being raised to an actual liveable wage over the years.

I've been working for over fifteen years, at many an odd job—grocery stores, bakeries and the like.

And, I never once made above the poverty line.

And the minimum wage hasn't gone up more than a dollar an hour in FIFTEEN years. But the cost of food...skyrocketed. Travel....skyrocketed.

Gas...skyrocketed. Everything else has gone up,

But people are not making any more, and people are working less hours.

Grocery stores now hire 4 people where they used to hire 18.

And cut the hours. That's just one example.

But, yet...whenever there is celebration of a wage increase by a state or company, there seems to always be those who have the audacity, to say "those people" (whoever "those people" might be at any point in time when an us vs them attitude, a competitiveness has been fabricated) don't DESERVE to get a raise and then attacked the perceived worth of those people, assuming that all people who work at "dead-end jobs" are stupid or lazy or not worthy for some other reason to be able to afford to keep a roof over their heads, and food on their tables. That "those people" don't deserve to make as much as them. Because their job is "easier" than the job they are doing. There is so much wrong with that way of thinking that I don't think I even need to point it out.

And....add to that, add to that, that these very same people who are railing against the minimum wage going up are also railing against any sort of government aid.

This is the very same kind of self-righteousness that angered Jesus enough to flip tables in the temple. This very same behavior is the argument that those who came to the field first were using. But that's a human value system; that is not God's value system. Your worth is not based on how smart you are, or your looks, or what job you have, or what car you drive, or how old you are...not really.

That's what your pride thinks; but that's not the Truth. The Truth of the matter is that your worth is not earned, it's not gained by working a certain job, or about anything you do for that matter. Your worth cannot increase or decrease. That's your pride. Your worth is not based on reward and punishment. Your worth is a constant grounded in being a part of Creation. The very Creation that

God saw was good. That's it, peoples. God didn't create humanity, then see what job they had, or what house they lived in, before He decided it was good.  
God just created. That's it.  
And God saw that it was good.  
Full stop. Period. End of sentence.  
Just in being created—you are good, you are worthy.  
I could go the biology route, and come to the same conclusion.  
We exist, and that is our worth. We are part of the whole creation.  
So, no...poor people do not have less worth than the rich.  
But, sadly, that's the way some people act. They act of pride and jealousy,  
And God reacts with mercy and generosity. An attitude that is selfish, it's all about me, doesn't matter what happens to others attitude.....hurts us all.  
Envy because of generosity...no. Gratitude because of generosity...yes.  
Showing mercy to others because mercy has been shown...yes.  
Receiving mercy, but remaining selfish...no. That's not the way of Jesus. And, that's just not a way to be a decent human being.  
No one DESERVES more than anyone. No one DESERVES to be treated with anything less than love and honor.  
Not having a master's degree,  
Or growing up in a middle-class family,  
Or growing up poor,  
Or not going to college....  
Nothing at all...increases your worth, and decreases another's worth.  
It's not about comparisons. It never was. Period. End of story.  
I am thankful for all that the people of St. Martin's do for those in need.  
Y'all are doing Good. Real good. Keep that up.

The idea of the American Dream is built on that lie.  
That if you just work hard enough, you'll get more.  
And that's what you deserve for working harder.  
But, no.  
I hate to break it to you...  
none of that makes you more valuable,  
more worthy of love, more worthy of safety.  
Because no one can be more worthy or less worthy,  
more deserving or less deserving,  
Because that's just not the way it really works.  
God's justice is more like each getting what they need.  
And, certainly, not about each person thinking  
they are more important than someone else.  
Things, thankfully, are not what they seem  
as we stand at the edge of the world.

End of rant.