

Sermon- First Covenant Minneapolis  
July 8, 2018

Ruthie Mattox: She does what I cannot do, and have not

- Perseverance
- Empathy
- Humility

A moment of humility, that fits as a starting point to understand 2nd Thessalonians

- Standing at the entryway to Yale Law in 1987

Magic Dust speech-- what was it?

Who I found there, in a class of 170 people:

- Cornell Brooks
- Jeb Boasberg (ICE can't reject asylum without a hearing)
- Brett Kavanaugh, who might tomorrow become SCT pick
  - will be fourth YLS grad, with Sotomayor, Thomas, Alito
- What we did
  - Tried to figure out what the Constitution meant
  - Many of us became experts, and saw a different thing
    - Cornell saw race, Pam saw gender, Brett saw limits, I saw mercy
  - The reader becomes the text

And what of this?

- Hard to take, as Todd put it
  - 1) Those unwilling to work should not eat
  - 2) Shun those who do not follow these instructions
- Injunctions to judge and punish, to **push some into the valley**

It might be tempting to simply reject it out of hand

- By the end of the 20th Century, majority of biblical scholars had concluded this wasn't even written by Paul

It depends on how we read the Bible

- much as it depends how we read the Constitution
- we start with a need, then choose a reading that suits that need?

A few models:

1) It is all God's word, and equally directive

- That when people met in the 4th Century to decide what went into the Canon, God led them to choose, and all are of equal merit

2) This is a book, full of truths, about God's work, in different forms of expression

I choose the second. Here is why:

The book itself does not claim to all be from God

Different books mean different things: Poetry, history, songs, inspiration

- They are not an instruction manual
- As history, even, they offer up different eras
  - OT, NT, era of the Holy Spirit
  - And this? It is one person's opinion

Can we just take each for what it claims to be? That Mark contains stories about Jesus. I think it authentically reflects that. That Thessalonians 2 is a letter from a fellow follower of Christ to an early church.

The danger becomes worshipping the Bible and not Christ

- problem with conflating the two: Sometimes there are conflicts
  - Those conflicts brought directly to Christ

- Two Great commandments (Matthew 22:34-40)
- Healing a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6)
- Love is more important than rules

### Donut Christianity

- Patch together Romans 13, some stuff from OT law, and you have constructed a religion of judgement of others
  - Sessions
  - BUT... that conflicts with Christ's direction
    - the hole in the donut
  - Who said, repeatedly, to judge ourselves, not others

And what of this? Who do we feed?

Jesus said when you feed those who are hungry, you feed me (Matthew 25)  
 Jesus told his apostles to "feed my lambs + "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17)  
 Jesus FED those on the hillside without means-testing (Matthew 6:30-44)  
 -- five loaves and two fishes

So what do we do?

We worship Christ. We follow Christ.

Where does that take us? If we feed those who are hungry, if we clothe the naked, if we welcome the stranger, if we visit those in prison?

I'll never be on the Supreme Court. I won't teach at Harvard, or lead some big organization. But, I do think that moment of humility, standing motionless in the entryway, was for a reason.

What did I see in the Constitution? What I was called to. And what I was called to see was something that lined up with the Jesus who implores us to feed the hungry and visit those in prison. I saw clemency.

WaPo piece

VIDEO -- CNN

PHOTO -- KimK

VIDEO -- Alice leaving

VIDEO -- Alice video

This is who we judge, who we discard. We are better than that.

It is too much to harmonize everything in the Bible. It is not the work of mortals. But the call to love and mercy is within our reach. God will help us, in surprising ways, in that work.

Prayer: Lord of the Valley, you are our God. Thank you for this place, for these people, and for a Holy Spirit that can lead us to wisdom, if we are willing. Amen.

Benediction: And now we go forth, to understand the meaning of love, to struggle with the imperative to love, to subdue that which opposes love, and to bear witness to the love of the God of the Valley.