

# "A quiet and Peaceable Life"

Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

September 19, 2010

A lot of stuff swirls around in my head this morning. It is really a luck thing that there is a lot of empty space in there for it to swirl in.

I want more than anything to talk with you about the opening of our second lesson. I think that it is an incredible text that reminds us that it is God's great desire that we have a quiet and peaceable life and what is most amazing is how scripture suggests we can get there. A peaceable life is something that I think that every one really wants in a world that seems to turn too fast and is filled with too much that is difficult and hard to deal with - a world that often leaves us anywhere but in a quiet and peaceable place. And so the author of that letter to Timothy writes urging us to truly love and care for one another .... In so doing - as our lives become filled with compassion, concern and loving action toward our neighbors, we reap the benefits of a quiet and peaceable life. What an incredible and simple thought - love those around you and you experience peace. Do you believe it? Don't you want to try it?

I would love to talk about that but there is so much more swirling around in front of us. We have other powerful scriptures that deal with really tough and important topics - a call to a life of justice - a call to be as shrewd in dealing with eternal affairs as we are with daily concerns ..... And on top of that it is Rally Day [what a great concept].

Think Rally Day for a moment. I can't even tell you how many times I think of my nephew asking very seriously one beautiful spring day if our church was 'out for the summer yet'. ..... Recently, I had a conversation with a fine Catholic woman who asked about Rally Day. She was saying that in the Catholic church they did not have such a concept because every Sunday, Spring, Summer, Winter and Fall was always a 'day of obligation', a day when members of the church were expected to worship and they did. Since folks did not take a break in the summer there was no need to rally the troops. Rally Day .... What an interesting concept! Is our relationship with God 'full time'? Do we take it seriously?

I read about an interesting legal question posed in The Saturday Evening Post recently. It seems that one Sunday at a particular church the sermon was extra long. At the conclusion of the service the congregation rushed, as usual, from its pews on the first syllable of "Amen!" One worshiper, faithful Abigail, the only worshiper held entranced by the sermon, moved slowly into the aisle and was trampled. She sued the church and its officials for damages. Her complaint stated that, "Those in charge of the church knew that most of the congregation stampedes after long sermons. They should have recognized the danger in the situation. Not being prepared to cope with it, they were negligent."

The church's attorney argued like this in response: "A church is a nonprofit organization manned for the most part by volunteers. No one has a right to expect it to be run with the smart efficiency of a business concern. Abigail, therefore, has no real claim."

I have no idea if any of that actually happened but it made me wonder. Do we take this whole business of church seriously? Is it just a gathering of volunteers that should not be expected to really know how to deal effectively with the church. Are we so anxious to get on with the important things in our lives that we can't wait to get out of the place? Is it a good social activity that just calls for involvement during the school year? Or is this serious, life shaping stuff that has the power to fill our lives with what we really all want so that we need to dedicate our lives to it? Ah, Rally Day! A quiet and peaceable life - justice and eternal life.

So we come to the gospel text with lots of stuff swirling in our heads. Some suggest that this is the hardest of all of Jesus' parable. A man is left in charge of the financial affairs of his rich master. Along the way the master learns that the financial manager has been dishonest with his money and calls him to account for his shady dealings. We aren't told exactly what kind of fraudulent dealings he was involved with - some would say that he was skimming some of the income off the top to line his own pockets; others suggest that he was over charging the masters debtors and keeping the excess for himself; but no matter what the offense the master was clearly not pleased and fired the manager. The parable progresses as we might expect up to this point but then we may begin to suspect that something strange is going on. Upon firing the dishonest employee we expect the master to immediately take away all of his responsibilities but the master allows the manager to continue with the books for a time in hopes of getting the mess straightened out. And to our way of seeing things this manager who had already been fired then proceeds to add insult to injury by reducing the debts of those who own the master money. Clearly we imagine that the master will lose even more money than he already has due to these additional actions of this money manager. We would think that the master would be even more angry at this point and punish the manager all the more severely. But in true parable form we come to an unexpected twist in the story. We are left surprised and baffled by the response of the offended master and the outcome of the story. The master smiles and the scoundrel of a manager receives a pat on the back. One might be tempted to think that the scriptures are commending dishonesty but we know that is not the case. It is not the dishonesty but the shrewdness that is employed to secure the future that is praised.

One commentator suggested that this would be a great opportunity to talk about the fact that there is nothing evil about money. Unfortunately, it is easy to get the sense that the Bible and the church thinks that money is evil and we should have nothing to do with it. Such is not the case. We are often reminded that it is the love of money - the obsessing over money that gets us in trouble. This parable might well be pointed to to suggest that it is important to deal wisely with the financial, earthly resources that we are intrusted with. This manager is commended for being smart enough to deal wisely with his earthly affairs.

The fact of the matter is that we are often very good at dealing with our earthly, financial affairs. It is tough when markets collapse and the rain keeps falling on the crop that remains in the fields. But at the very least, most are very diligent about doing what we can in hopes that we will have the financial means to provide the kind of life that we want to enjoy in the future. We go to work - balance our checkbooks - save for a rainy day - we put what we can into an IRA or 401K - we buy on sale and clip coupons. And you know what - I think that God, himself would look down on such careful planning and smile.

So my friends .... children of this age .... if you are careful to practice such practical issues to assure the future life that you want - consider yourself commended. And you .... the children of light. Are you as shrewd when it comes to your life as children of God? Are we little more than untrained volunteers that really don't know how to be the church. Are we so lax in living the life of children of the light that we think that we get off for the summer? Or are we so shrewd that we know that if we truly want a peaceable and quiet life it will come not by cheating our neighbors but by having compassion for them?

It is exciting to come again to Rally Day. It is uplifting to gather again to hear the good word from God and to know that in love God wants all the best for us - a quiet and peaceable life.

**AMEN**