GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

October 19 – Leaves

This is a beautiful time of year as the trees change colors. It is a delight to drive around and look at the trees, the colors, the beauty. The reds, oranges, yellows, and greens add a colored canopy all around us. I would venture to guess that I am not alone in looking at all the trees and the colors. The truth is, trees in the Fall are beautiful, if the tree is not in your yard, or your neighbor's yard. Then, we see that tree differently.

Generally, I love trees. Ask my family. I look at trees when we are out on vacation. This time of year, it changes. I can only speak for myself, although I would welcome knowing I am not alone in this relationship with the trees around my house. Each year, I go into a bit of a standoff with the trees around the house. The first leave falls and I look at it, acknowledge it, and then wait to mow over it with the grass around it. A few more fall and I enter an internal debate. Do I rake yet? Mulch them? Or, well, maybe we will get a good Westerly wind… Ok, not as much that last one. Then, there comes the time when it is a little too much. You have to rake them up and it turns into a huge undertaking.

This is the type of image that Jesus uses with those gathered around him. He speaks of a widow who is at a point where she needs help. As a widow, it would be the responsibility of her husband's household to care for her. This was not happening. The judge had the authority to intervene, making sure that she had the means of survival. That is all she was asking. She wanted to survive. The judge was not willing to listen or intervene. Day after day, those leaves piled up. The judge finally did his job.

What does this mean? Is Jesus saying that even the hardest of hearts can be persuaded by persistence? Is Jesus asking us to be relentless in our cries for justice? This seems like an odd way for Jesus to talk about our relationship with God. Jesus says, "And will not God grant justice for God's chosen ones who cry out day and night?" Jesus uses the judge's reluctance to intervene as the counter to God's response. Does God immediately answer our prayers and in the way that we ask?

There is considerable tension in this text. That is perhaps the best way to think about the role of parables; either they calm where there is tension or create tension where there is calm. This one creates some tension. It seems to say to be persistent in our asking, and bold in our expectations. Maybe that is what Jesus means by "will God find faith on earth?"

The parable is telling us to do what we can. I am reminded of a story from the Vietnam War. There was a pastor who would stand in front of the White House, light a candle, and pray in protest of the war. Day after day he stood there by himself. One day a person asked, "Why do you do this? Do you honestly think you can change the world?" The pastor responded, "No, I do not do this to change the world. I do this so that the world does not change me." This story is about both using the agency that you have and persisting so that you are not changed.

Friends, I have witnessed a lot of things over the years. I have witnessed people surviving and thriving when all seemed lost, and I have seen everything fall apart when the prognosis was promising. That does not mean that some prayers worked, and others did not. I believe that all of the prayers were answered in different ways. The one thing this parable states clearly, amid all of the tension, is that we are to pray and to pray boldly. The response to these prayers may vary greatly from what we pray, but we are to pray persistently.

Adding on what we talked about two weeks ago, when we work together, we can accomplish great things. I believe that our unity in prayer, in voice, and in action, can bring about great change around us. These changes will not happen overnight. It does take persistence. It may be the dropping of one leaf at a time, one prayer at a time, one act of kindness at a time, one donation at a time. After a while, no matter how small it may feel at the time, it grows into something far more than you imagined. These acts of love, partnered with the Holy Spirit, can change the world…one leaf at a time. Amen

Pastor Michael Schmidt