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Sermon

Over-Delivering with God

Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

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I was working through some ideas with clergy last week and we watched a video of a talented young man in his twenties. He wasn't a man of duty at all and yet he was known for his performance.

At one point he had this to say, "Don't teach people how to build a ship. Teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." He's asking, really, for motivation, not direction. Move me, don't make me feel obligated.

Well, I think motivation comes, not simply from a realisation of just how much God has done for us, but from a realisation of what God is doing in us and through us.

In our reading from Genesis this morning, Abraham offered the 3 visitors "a little" water and "a little" bread, but he delivered far more than that. "Cakes" made of "choice flour", a "calf," "tender and good" along with "curds and milk." Abraham over-delivered. Like God, he did far more than his visitors expected. Abraham was not simply thinking, "Let's give these travellers some water and bread and see them on their way. That way we'll have fulfilled our duty to be hospitable." No, he wanted the best for them.

Jesus, arrives, the son of a carpenter as far as people could see, and is born into an oppressed little nation. He takes on a band of simple Galileans and goes about a servant ministry amongst those whom Paul describes in Romans 10:21 as a gainsaying and recalcitrant people.

However, what was going on, really? In Colossians we see God over-delivering in Jesus. How is Jesus described?

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

I sometimes see the universe as an agglomeration of atoms and molecules and imagine Jesus simply letting go and everything dissolving into its constituent elements. He holds it all together. He is indeed Lord!

¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

“Come to have.” We’ll touch on that again.

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—

Paul goes on to refer to **the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Can we, this morning, long for the endless immensity of God’s love for us in Christ? Is this amazing vision of you and me caught up, not only in the immensity of God’s love, but in the passion of God’s purposes, enough to motivate us to build the Kingdom of God, to over-deliver in the mission we carry out with God?

Sometimes we need the bigger picture, and I suppose that could be what our young man on the video was referring to when he said, “Don’t teach people how to build a ship. Teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

Does this give us a clue to understanding what is going on in our Gospel reading, the story of Mary and Martha? It seems so unfair, doesn’t it? A bunch of men sitting at Jesus’ feet with Martha running around and making sure all the practical needs are met.

To make matters worse, her sister is not helping.

The old explanation that spiritual things are more important than physical things is bunkum. It’s Gnosticism for a start, it’s too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, and it’s certainly not in line with an understanding that in Christ the Good news is that the Kingdom of God is both here and still to come – the interim space being our time of building that Kingdom on earth so that God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

I once read an illustration of the Good News being similar to that brought by the messenger arriving hot foot in Rome with the news of a great victory for the empire in a battle that had taken place some distance in days away. People immediately begin living their lives in the light of this battle, planning investments etc. They didn’t wait for proof in the form of exhausted soldiers and their booty. They on with the job of positive living in the light of the good news of victory.

However, back on the battlefield the general is still mopping up patches of resistance, dealing with the wounded and gathering the spoils that will garnish his eventual triumphal procession. The victory is heard of at one time, but manifest later.

So it is with the kingdom of God. It is both here and still to come. And these are not poles apart. It’s a continuum, and in the interstices, in the liminal, neither here nor there, space between these two God events, we work in the power of the Holy Spirit, building, with Christ in us, the Kingdom of God!

When you read, **‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her,’** think

of the words of our young man, *“Don’t teach people how to build a ship. Teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”*

Sometimes, especially when he was aware of how little time he had left and how much he had to teach his disciples, Jesus got them to focus on what was really important. This is one of those times. In other words, *‘Martha, unless you develop a passion, a vision for what I am achieving here on earth, you will forever be running around in circles feeding a group of men.*

Martha, unless you catch a vision of God’s purposes on earth, and especially for the role his people play in those purposes, you’ll run out of vision and energy pretty quickly.’

In Paul’s eyes as expressed through a Colossians lens, *“Martha, your destination is not for you to be here, and Jesus there. It’s for Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, to be in you, and you in him. Martha, that is the hope of glory! There is much of a practical nature to do, only now you need to catch the vision of why that is so moving, wonderful, significant – and part of what God is doing on earth. You, Martha are destined to bring heaven to earth. Listen to my words and let that sink in. Right now Mary is catching on to this. Put down your tray, Martha, sit down here with your sister where you can focus on what God is doing, not what you feel obligated to do right now.”*

You see it’s not like Mary was skiving off, scrolling through Facebook or watching an endless array of You Tube clips. Mary was transfixed by her Lord. What Jesus is suggesting is that Martha places herself in a position where she too can be transfixed by God’s love and the vision of the Kingdom of God - God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

God always over-delivers. If we want to do the same we need to be fired up with a vision of what it is God is doing and how we fit into that. It’s that simple.

God bless you all.