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Matthew 21:23-32
Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32
Psalm 25:1-9
Philippians 2:1-13

September 27, 2020

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Do you know that moment when everything is turned upside down? When life changes in the blink of an eye and everything you thought you knew suddenly reverses direction?

We had one of those moments this week. Camden was in a very serious car accident. He was on his way to school. It was 7:30am in the morning and my phone rings. It's Camden and in a calm but stunned voice he said, "Mom, my car's gone." And then he started to cry.

Are you Ok? What happened? I will be right there!

Let me jump to the end...other than the effects of a concussion and a small abrasion over his eye, Camden was OK. If you saw the pictures of the car you would wonder how he survived. Camden was rear ended at a stop light...the car behind him must have never slowed down because the impact was so severe. It sent Camden's car into the car in front of him. And then that car was forced into the one in front of it. Camden's car, however, took the full force of the impact on both ends and crumbled.

Everything in the world turned upside down in that moment. Yet, the overwhelming emotion I felt when I heard Camden's voice was gratitude. Gratitude for my son's life. Gratitude for the first responders. Gratitude for the police officers. Gratitude for the car that did exactly what it was supposed to do and held my son safely in the confines of its steel frame and airbags that saved his life. Gratitude for God who blessed us all beyond measure that day.

In moments like this, what matters becomes very, very clear. We find that we are simply grateful for life. For the small things. For each other. Moments like this may turn everything upside down but they also reorient us to something better if we allow them to.

What has been your upside down moment?

Maybe you were diagnosed with a serious illness that you never expected. Maybe you hit rock bottom as you struggled with addiction. Maybe you had to face a divorce that blind-sided you. Maybe you lost a loved one who you never thought you would have to live without.

When those moments hit, you find yourself standing there, raw, with no armor to protect yourself, no ability to handle what is barreling down at you. It feels debilitating and humbling. It is scary and unsettling.

But, in those moments we have a choice. We have a choice to claim our future, a second chance, a new perspective. And...we start with gratitude. Because this life we are given is God's

greatest gift to each and every one of us. And with this life, we are given such beautiful opportunities to grow into the people God intends us to become.

I can't tell you all enough...no matter your age, young or old, you matter so much. To your families, to your friends, to this community, to God. Even when things seem so out of control, you matter beyond measure and (please hear this) God has a plan for you.

What if you could grasp on to that truth when things turn upside down? What would God be telling you in that moment?

Stop and listen.

When we listen, I think we hear something similar to our Psalmist this morning. Psalm 25 is grappling with this very dynamic...a life turned upside down and the opportunity to move forward, to make something out of the damage that is being experienced. Looking for a way to be grateful for God's plan even in the depths of pain.

Listen to portions of Psalm 25 again:

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame. Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me. Good and upright is the Lord. He leads the humble in what is right....

This beautiful Psalm is ultimately a prayer; a prayer in the midst of incredible adversity; a prayer that is built upon complete trust in God. A trust that produces dynamic hope which moves us forward into a life worth living. We don't know exactly what the Psalmist experienced but we get a sense that we have been there, too. We have felt despair. We have pleaded for mercy and we have been grateful for forgiveness and new paths forward.

The Psalmist shows us that God will make our lives better, no matter what may have upended who we are, no matter what decisions we may regret, no matter what we may struggle with. The Psalmist faithfully affirms that all we need to do is put it all in God's hands. Guilt, shame, pain, anger, depression, regret, lose, or despair.

That is where we will find God. How can we not be grateful for these kinds of second chances, this kind of hope, this kind of love?

So, call it what it is. Sometimes our lives will turn upside down. But we can be grateful for the life God's provides to us, out of the darkness, with gifts of abundance and grace and mercy. You have a second chance to claim God's life for you. And with that we say, "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." Alleluia and Amen.