

“The faith-driven life”

November 16, 2008

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30

I.

As people of faith, how do we embrace the world? How do we see everyday events? Through what kind of prism?

- A prism of fear and distrust?
- Or a prism of faith and abiding trust in the ONE who is the Giver of life in all seasons?

The difference here is everything. And it has everything to do with how we see God ... the sense we have of God.

I'm troubled this morning by two tragic events of the past ten days:

1. The death of 19-year old David Vitiello ten days ago ...
2. And the shooting death of 15-year old Amanda Collette this past week in Ft. Lauderdale.

What does all this death mean? David took his own life. Amanda was shot at Dillard High School by her 15-year old classmate and friend, Teah Wimberly.

We did the Funeral for David here this past Tuesday and I have at least some sense of what might have been going on with him. In both instances, I am almost certain, if David Vitiello and Teah Wimberly could turn the clock back ... if they could reverse their awful act, they would.

As is so often the case in these sorts of tragic events, there was no doubt no consideration of consequences.

1. Of what the world might be like *afterwards*—after I kill myself and my parents and friends are overwhelmed with sorrow.
2. Or, *after* I kill my friend and my life and the lives of countless others are forever diminished and saddened. What about the consequences?

II.

In reflecting on all of this, I can't help but be deeply concerned about the question: ***Do our children have faith?*** You parents out there this morning, listen up!

1. I'm not saying that if your children don't come to church and don't learn their faith story ... that if they don't have a *sense of God's presence in their lives* that they're going to make tragic decisions in their lives.
2. But I am saying that if they have a sense of the *presence of God* in their lives, it will make a difference. And the difference it makes might be critical.

To a great extent, how we see God is how we see life. Is God a God of love and compassion, a God of infinite mercy and forgiveness and generosity, a God of lasting peace and amazing grace?

Or, is God a stern God of harsh judgment and darkness? I can't keep from asking myself: what demons were tormenting 19 year-old David's spirit at the very moment he made the final decision that took his life? How did he get to such a dark place?

And what darkness had overcome 15 year-old Teah's spirit when she somehow said *yes* to the idea of taking a concealed gun to school and actually pulling trigger that resulted in her friend, Amanda's death? From all reports, she loved Amanda.

But what about these demons and the darkness? They're not *of* God. They're from some other domain or place. And where is faith in any of this?

Let's look at the parable!

III.

Preparing to leave on a long journey, a man entrusts his property to his servants. To one he gives 5 talents, to another 2, and to another 1, each according to his ability. (Now, we need to know that a *talent* is in fact a lavish amount, equal to perhaps 15 years of wages for a common wage earner in Jesus' world of 1st century Palestine).

Let's see what these three servants do with this opportunity ... they're been entrusted with a lot of money.

The first two go out immediately, make sound investments and double what has been given them. However, the third servant goes a totally different route: he takes his money out in the backyard, digs a hole and buries it.

Whoa! What a contrast to the other servants! Now—before we move on, we need to know that much of what this parable is about is ***living with the consequences of our faith.***

Sure enough, after a long time away, the master of these servants returns and begins to settle accounts with them. With the first two servants, everything is good. They've done much with what had been entrusted to them and the master is pleased.

Well done, he says. ***Because you have done so well with what I entrusted to you, let me give you still more.*** And to each of them, he says: ***Come, now, and enter into the JOY of my abundance.***

But for the rogue, third servant, it was another story. *Master*, he said, *I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid ... and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is, what you gave me.*

However, this third servant is severely rebuked, and all that he has is taken from him and given to the servant with ten talents. And Jesus concludes:

To all who have, more will be given, and they will have in abundance; but for those who have nothing, even the little that they have will be taken away.

IV.

What happened to this third servant? In contrast to the first two servants, clearly, his faith was **fear-driven**. He saw God as stern and harsh. How sad! For him, the glass is always half empty. His life is tinged with darkness ... to where he's paralyzed to *risk* living the gospel, which is what the parable invites us to do.

The gospel of Jesus is about life ... and hope ... and the immense joy of being in each other's presence in loving and compassionate ways. When we dare to live the gospel, there is no enduring darkness that the light of God's love cannot overcome.

I'm not saying that we don't have our human moments ... when darkness comes close. Hey, all the time, stuff happens. But we don't dwell there.

- The darkness does NOT define our lives.
- It does *not* overcome us. It does *not* tell us who we are.
- The light of God's love—which is the light of Easter joy—is simply too bright, too powerful. We can't celebrate Easter—I mean *really* celebrate Easter (which suggests we understand the full meaning of the crucifixion)—and live in darkness. It can't happen.

But what about David Vitiello, for whom it's now too late; and Teah Wimberly, who will no doubt spend much of the rest of her young life in prison? How could they ever know the joy of Easter light if they don't know our Christian story? Now, maybe they knew it; but I doubt that they did.

Let me tell you what struck me about David's Funeral. Two things:

1. During the sharing time ... the comments of some of his friends suggested a world of darkness where, somehow, the finality of David's death was not fully

grasped. As if he were somehow going to leap out of the casket, back to life. In other words, as if the *very real* consequences of David's awful decision had not fully sunk in.

2. And secondly, at the mausoleum, when I was standing next to the casket as they were preparing to move David to his final resting place, we were saying the Lord's Prayer. There must have been easily one hundred to one hundred-fifty people there ... with many of his friends standing to my left nearby.

Besides the Funeral Director and some assorted adults, I was saying the prayer alone. My guess is, they didn't know it.

They didn't know the prayer about the Holy One who is the Giver of life ... the One who takes care of our every spiritual need ... the One who forgives, again and again ... the One whose spirit guides us and nurtures us and moves us beyond temptation. They didn't know anything about *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by your name ...*

How utterly sad.

V.

Again, **will our children have faith?** They sure won't have it if we their parents and their church don't give it to them. How can our children, our youth, and our young adults live **faith-driven** lives if they never learn our faith story? If they never hear the words of love ... about how ...

*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes
all things and endures all things. Love never ends.*

And Jesus' words to us in John's gospel:

I give you this commandment, said Jesus, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Always in our faith, it's all about the love.

And how will they live **faith-driven** lives if they never hear the words of forgiveness and grace ... the disciple Peter asked Jesus:

*Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?
As many as seven times? Not seven times, said Jesus, but seventy times seven.*

And how will their lives be **faith-filled** if they never hear the words of hope and salvation ... *For in hope we are saved, says Paul.*

And there is nothing that can separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life; neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers; neither the world above nor the world below, neither the present nor the future. There is nothing in all of creation that can ever separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The faith-driven life knows this. Why? Because such a life has heard the words over the years. **The faith-driven life** has heard the Christian story ... over and over ... to the point where it settles in. It becomes a part of our lives. And we grow up with an ingrained sense of the gospel of Jesus.

As Paul reminds us in **1 Thessalonians 5**, *For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died that we might know God more fully. Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other ...*

VI.

The tragedies of these young people grab us and shake us at our foundations. They're so senseless and mindless. They didn't have to be. And now look at the consequences.

- The lives that are forever lost; where the light of life has been snuffed out.
- the life that is ruined into the foreseeable future ...
- and all the others—parents, family and friends—with huge holes in their hearts.

All we can do, friends, is to continue to put our **faith-driven lives** out there ... like the first two servants in the parable ... continuing to lift up hope ... trusting in the unwavering goodness of God ... the God who yearns, every moment, for each of us to **enter into the joy of God's abundance**.

For that abundance is all we need. In the light of that abundance, there is no darkness; and *mourning and crying will be no more ...*

For God has so loved the world that he gave us Jesus, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

The **faith-driven** life is what we are called to, friends—everyday, every moment.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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