

**A sermon preached by the Rev. Jeanne Leinbach  
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio  
on June 9, 2024**

*Genesis 3:8-15; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35*

Preachers are always on the lookout for stories or ideas that might be helpful in a sermon someday. We might be moved by a human-interest story we hear in the news or be intrigued by a new insight in an article we're reading. We might find ourselves in a conversation with friends or family when someone relays a story, and we think, huh, that could be helpful in preaching, so we jot it down and file it away for a future sermon. Well, I always thought I'd preach someday on the tv show *Ted Lasso*. Here I am on my last preaching Sunday at St. Paul's, and *Ted Lasso* works just beautifully with the Gospel lesson. So, here we go. Ted Lasso is an American college football coach who is hired to coach a Premier League soccer team in England. He knows nothing about soccer and doesn't realize that he is being hired to fail. But the unexpected happens. Ted's optimism and goodness will bring a smile to your face. This series is on Apple TV; I promise you it is worth the cost of the subscription. So, how does *Ted Lasso* relate to the Gospel?

Recall the last words of the Gospel this morning. Jesus said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." We've come across this friction before...on first hearing, Jesus words seem harsh. He seems to be rejecting his mother and brothers who are standing right outside the room from where Jesus is speaking to the crowd. But Jesus is not rejecting them. He is inviting us to expand our worldview. Remember, the Israelites were bound by 613 commandments and 60% of those commandments told them what they could not do, "Thou Shalt Not." Then, Jesus comes along and says Thou Shall. Jesus flips our world view to focus on the possibility, not warning us about all that we

can't be, but encouraging us to be all that we can be. Jesus is not rejecting his biological family. He is encouraging us to view life broadly, to embrace those who are different from us: those who look different, or act differently, or think differently, or believe differently. He is encouraging us to embrace those who lack where we abound and embrace those who abound where we lack. He is encouraging us to see through different lenses, so that we will learn and grow, so that we will love as God loves, so that we will live life fully as God desires us to live.

Ted Lasso is all about seeing through different lenses. The show invites us into the challenges of humanity...race and gender issues, negative emotions including vengefulness, anger, pride, jealousy. Yet, in every episode, the goodness of humanity shines through. This soccer community of owner, manager, coaches and players from various backgrounds, cultures, and countries, become family to one another. They live through life's challenges – at times disagreeing with one another, at times hurting one another - but ultimately, they learn from, support, and care for one another – ultimately, they love one another. Seriously, you should watch this show. You will experience the goodness of God's hope for humanity.

Let's turn now to the lesson from 2 Corinthians, which gets to the heart of the matter, gets to the heart of how we are inspired to live in the fullness of God's love. "We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." Emotions are a felt experience. We know this...think about fear, anger, sadness, joy. So is faith; faith is a felt experience. Perhaps you've heard the term thin places. These are moments where heaven and earth seem to meet, where we experience the Divine: "what cannot be seen is eternal." Just as clergy are always gathering ideas and examples for preaching, we are also always trying to learn how to worship ourselves while we are leading worship. How can we be looking one step ahead to be sure worship continues to proceed

smoothly, and still be present in the moment? A few weeks ago, I was officiating and saying the Eucharistic Prayer attempting to be present in the words I was speaking when I had an overwhelming experience of Jesus's great love. When I said the words, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me," I gasped, quietly. "Do this for the remembrance of me." Jesus so wants us to experience God's eternal, abundant, forgiving, inspiring, life-enduring, life-sustaining, life-giving love. "Do this for the remembrance of me." The thin places where we experience the Divine are felt, not seen. When we have these experiences, we need to share them with others, encouraging each other to remain open to "what cannot be seen." Because "what cannot be seen" is what inspires us to live faithful, loving lives. It is through "what cannot be seen" that we live most authentically and most completely.

The members of our Program Staff take turns sharing an article for us to discuss at the beginning of our weekly Staff Meeting. Recently, Rev. Patricia brought in a chapter from Henri Nouwen's book entitled *Discernment* (HarperOne, NY, 2013). Nouwen was a priest, writer, and theologian. Nouwen reminds us, "To want to know God's plan and purpose without regular prayer and engagement with scripture and God's people is like trying to bake a cake without assembling the various ingredients. Discernment grows out of a life of faith rooted in community" (p. 16). We need to pray, we need to engage with scripture, we need to live in community with one another in order to come upon the eternal that cannot be seen. Divine love is waiting for us. Divine love is always seeking to transform our lives, to open our hearts to the love that is our companion through heartache, our savior in forgiveness, our inspiration for new beginnings, our grantor of joy, our patron of peace.

Keep being community, keep praying, keep seeking, keep serving, keep loving.

Remember Nouwen's prophetic words: "Love is stronger than fear, joy is deeper than sorrow, unity is more real than division, and life is stronger than death" (p. 13). Amen.