

Sermon July 16, 2017 "Quicken Me, O God" Cara B. Hochhalter

Genesis 25:19-34 and Matthew 13:1-9

Don't we all wake up a bit when someone asks, "What do you think?" It feels kind of good, doesn't it when someone cares enough to want to *hear* what we think... it might even take us by surprise! What do I think....oh, well, what do I think... Sometimes it is in answering this question that it becomes more clear what we do think about whatever it is!?

When someone asks what we think, you might say we are "quicken!"

I took the title of this sermon from the Psalm in our canticle this morning. "Quicken me, O God "...to quicken means to awaken, to kind of jerk to attention...to vivify, resuscitate, renew, bring us out of the doldrums in a lively and sudden way!

The word "quicken" has also been used to describe that time when a pregnant woman begins to feel movement within her...The fetus quickened! Suddenly, it seems, there is life! It is an amazing feeling!

I think that God/Christ yearns for us to quicken...when we hear these stories I think we may all of a sudden "get it"...and feel that sense of coming alive and being awakened to the way God's word may be at work in our own lives....so get ready!

Let us be in prayer: Quickening God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Two powerful stories today, to wake us up! One from our Judeo-Christian story-line that comes to us from thousands of years ago as our Hebrew scriptures passed the stories along. It follows the genealogical line from Abraham to his son, Isaac and now to Isaac and Rebekah's twins, Essau and Jacob.

You heard the story of sibling rivalry, with the younger brother conniving to overpower the older. It doesn't take long to realize that our stories of faith are not all about goody-two shoes...Rather they seem to show how God *worked through* the humanness, the rascally-ness, the pride and selfishness, the short-sightedness of characters to *even then* bring God's vision for goodness into this world... How God continues to work through our own humanness, and rascally-ness and short-sightedness...and pride...in efforts to bring shalom to our world!

The second powerful story comes in the form of a parable, one that Jesus told. As you know, I love these parables and have created this image on the cover of your bulletin. How you interpret it is mostly up to you! In Matthew, there is an explanation that follows the text, but I prefer to hear it alone because I don't think Jesus explained everything. Don't we learn better when *we* figure it out.... Maybe Jesus appreciated "critical thinking." He told these little tales to get people asking questions so they would wake up to the truth as God was telling it to *them!* You may say his words "quicken" in them!

And maybe they will quicken within you this morning! Picture this: Jesus had been preaching to such a large gathering along the Sea of Galilee...they began to crowd in on him so he got into a boat to tell this story. Some of you have seen this big lake...it can be very calm and it can also be rough. I am picturing it as smooth as glass as Jesus sat in the boat, rocking a bit as he talked to the crowds on the shore. Barbara Brown Taylor writes that "Jesus' words were full of life but as hard to hold as a handful of lake!"

You can look at the image on the cover if you want as you hear again Jesus raising his voice a bit across the water ....to you:

*"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"*

Listen, Jesus said.... Come awake, come alive...this is Good News that can turn your world around! How do you imagine these seeds that are being sown all around in such abundance? Are the seeds God's word, a holy kind of love that instills all life... Might they be our own words or acts of charity and love?

And who is the sower? In this image, Jeff is the sower because I looked at his hand when making the drawing! Is it God who "broadcasts" seeds of love, compassion, forgiveness...Who is it that generously offers this WAY of relating?

I wonder what Jesus would think of the kinds of seeds that are broadcast through our news in these days?!

Are we fertile soil for this WAY that Jesus taught? Can the seeds of love and forgiveness and generosity take root in us? Do we even notice when distractions like the birds, the thorns and the sun, get in the way; when we make it hard for God's word to take root...in us?

Barbara Brown Taylor again says, " It is not about our own successes and failures but about the extravagance of a sower who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon...confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty... and the harvest will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters."

So, what do you think?.....Any thoughts?.....what might this parable mean in your life?

Let anyone with ears, listen. Are you awakened, yet? Do you feel "quickened?" You know what wakes me up as I think about this parable...is that we are not to be stingy...with this Holy love. And maybe it is freeing to know that some of it will not be well received but we can just keep offering it anyway...extravagant welcome, love that affirms and forgives and delights...in all of humanity...even in the midst of our humanness....because after all, it really isn't about us... but about the generosity of love from which we all have our being...call it God, Grace or Glory!

Thomas Long writes, "Therefore, the *church* is called to "waste itself" to throw grace around like there is no tomorrow, precisely because there is a tomorrow, and it belongs to God."

Let our imaginations be awakened as we live this word of incredible love....every day...out and beyond the church walls as well...Jesus took his preaching out onto a lake, for goodness sake! He went out into the crowds of people who were oppressed and were being taken advantage of by both governing forces and religious structures... but Jesus told stories that invited them intimately into a sense of God's extravagant love....and we are called to do the same.

Perhaps this excitement has been lost in some religious organizations... We hear that some in our society today, do not trust "organized religion." Whether they have had bad church experiences in the past or perhaps they have had no experience with church and don't know what it is....

We might ask how we sow these seeds more broadly? Out beyond the walls of this building...I do believe you all do this in the ways you are in relationship with others.

And then perhaps we must learn to listen to how God is already broadcasting seeds from other places.

These stories DO quicken within me and as you can tell, I love to share them! Thank you for being part of this faith community where we continue to both be the sowers and the sowers...to be the ground that receives God's incredible love...that multiplies...a hundredfold...in here and out there, if we but have ears to hear!!

Here is a little poem by the poet/farmer Wendell Berry to close this sermon:

*Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye,  
clear. What we need is here.*

*Amen.*