



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

MICHAELMAS

9 AND 11AM

REVELATION 12:7-13, MATTHEW 13:44-46

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

Two weeks ago I was praying with 2 missionaries from China and our own parishioner Lori Moore. As we were praying Lori prayed something that stopped me in my tracks. It was spontaneous and powerful...she prayed, "Lord, Help us Live Like We're Leavin!" Like good southern grits, it stuck with me and is actually the perfect theme for Michaelmas and our new Worship Schedule! Lord, Help us Live Like We're Leavin! But what does that mean?

Let me take you right into Matthew 13 to understand this. There are 8 parables jammed into 50 verses in this chapter. But today we only have time to hit one of them. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found just one pearl, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it!" The Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. What is the Kingdom of Heaven? The Kingdom of Heaven is the spiritual realm over which God reigns as king - the fulfillment on Earth of God's will. Like the Lord's Prayer...Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done! It is the realm where Jesus exercises His power to act and control. The Kingdom isn't geographical. The Kingdom is any moment where we make Jesus Lord of our life, and call on Him. What happens when we do? We begin living in His Kingdom of forgiveness! Living the fruit of the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. That's living The Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

But the Kingdom of God has a future element too. It means when we have made Jesus Lord of our life, we know that when we die, we will live with Jesus in his eternal Kingdom Forever. Meaning we don't need to fear our death! Living with no fear of death. Which is why Jesus says discovering the Kingdom of Heaven is the equivalent of discovering the finest pearl! When we make that discovery we will sell everything to attain it!

Jesus uses the word pearl here because pearls in the ancient day were the loveliest of all possessions! Why? Pearls don't come from the earth, they come from the depths of the sea. Because of that, they require no special cutting or polishing, there is a natural beauty! In fact, in the ancient day, pearls could only be discovered along the shores of the Red Sea and parts of far-off Britain! Merchants would scour the markets of the entire world just for one pearl! So precious were pearls that in the 1st century BC, Julius Caesar passed a law limiting the wearing of pearls only to the ruling classes as the ultimate status symbol.

The Kingdom of Heaven, is the loveliest PEARL on earth because it points to deepest contentment, deepest joy, now and forever. In fact we could even say Jesus is the pearl! When through the Holy Spirit we seek Jesus with all our heart, when we welcome Him into our life, our homes, He transforms us into the most forgiving and forgivable, loving and lovable people on earth! Jesus brings the most powerful forgiveness out of sin, contentment out of anxiety, peace out of fear, and joy out of despair! When we make Jesus king of our lives, he gives us eternity with Him. Again, no fear of death. Isn't that worth selling everything for? Yes, we will give away our pride, our ego, our sin nature, and we will die to self to attain the pearl of the Kingdom! And that's when we start Livin' Like We're Leavin! We start living not for this world and the material stuff, but living for the next world. We start living for the day we see Jesus face to face. Living that life of forgiving others because we will be seeing them again in heaven. Livin' Like We're Leavin as people practicing repentance because as Jesus says, how can I forgive you if you can't forgive another?

I think of the song by a Christian Group called East-West and their lyrics:

I want to live like I'm leaving, Like Heaven is in view
Live like I'm leaving, I will be evidence of You

Let me give you a real life example. Some years ago Libby and I were preparing to take a group of St. Michaelites to Israel. We had to literally live like we were leaving....packing the right clothes, writing talks I needed to give there. But living like we were leaving also meant taking care of relational debts. The Lord convicted me before I left to write a letter to a neighbor I thought I had offended when I blew my Patriot touchdown horn too late into the night! If anything were to happen to me in Israel, I certainly didn't want to die without asking forgiveness!

But, there is a reason this is so hard to do, and it all has to do with Michaelmas. Michaelmas is defined as the day of the year we recall the story of Archangel Michael, our church's namesake. Archangel Michael is the principal fighter of the heavenly battle against Satan. Revelation 12 tells us all about the war in heaven. Michael and his angels fighting Satan and his demons. Which by the way reaffirms the fact that Satan is real, evil is real, and to get a picture, just look at our window above the altar. Satan had been an angel, but Michael hurls Satan out of heaven because of Satan's pride. Most scholars believe that Michael hurled Satan to earth right at the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, for it was in that moment Satan's ultimate defeat was assured.

This is good news for heaven, Satan was gone. But horrible news for earth. Revelation 12:12 says, "Rejoice all you in Heaven, but to you still on earth? Woe to you, because Satan now lives among you. " And here is what's terrifying: Satan knows that because of the Resurrection, Jesus will win on the last day. And because of that, Satan has one goal: to destroy as many earthly people as he can before he himself gets destroyed. Therefore Satan lives among us and is filled with fury because he knows his time on earth is short. He knows he loses in the end. His job description is in his name. Satan means Condemner, Accuser, Seducer.

What's even more terrifying is verse 13.

When Satan realized he had been hurled to earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. Who was the woman? The woman represents all faithful Jews and all believers in Christ today! Put another way, the woman is the Church, the bride of Christ battling Satan.

Which is why, we have to be Livin' Like We're Leavin! Because You can bet your bottom dollar that Satan is Livin' Like he's Leavin! And wants to take as many of us down with him as he can! How can you detect him? Well, He is living like he's leaving...meaning he's living a life of hatred, sorrow, anxiety, impatience, meanness, badness, and with no self-control. Yes, the opposite of the fruit of the spirit. He is the champion of violence, rage, regret, and complete unforgiveness. Basically, the author of the daily news.

Livin' Like We're Leavin! Because we know Satan is Livin' Like he's Leavin! My friends, be transparent with me for a moment. Who is winning in your life? If you are here this morning with unforgiveness, for example, you are playing into the hands of Satan. Are you livin' for the pearl of greatest price? Or are living for this life only, and falling into Satan's trap? Paul in Ephesians 4 says, do not give Satan a foothold!

Jesus died on the cross to Live like he was leaving, so you and I could live now and forever! The ultimate way to respond is to ask Jesus to take over the throne of your life, to put Him in charge...or even back in charge! And to say Jesus, would you help me living like I'm leaving? As Ken Boa said last week, in a world where civility has been replaced by Imbecility, Lord, help me practice radical forgiveness. Help me repent. Help me live with heaven in view on earth. St. Michael's Church herself is living like we're leaving by creating more worship services, extending our reach through live stream worship on computer and asking you to invite others to church and PodZ, so we can to bring as many into the Kingdom of Heaven before it's too late.

In fact, today in our announcements, you're going to hear Michaelmas stories of people livin' like they are leavin'. One such is Betty Schaffer. Some months ago, and very unexpectedly, Betty and Jim's son Brad died. It would have been very natural for Betty to go into a deep isolation and depression. But Betty dealt with her grief another way. She dealt with her grief by serving others, specifically, serving on the congregational care team. As part of that team, she called many St. Michaelites she didn't even know just to see if they were okay during covid. Livin' Like she's Leavin! One person she called was a member here years ago and had just moved back to town. Betty sensed in her a real disconnection. Betty then called one of the clergy, who then invited this parishioner to a Sunday Afternoon backyard podz. She has been attending ever since! Betty...Livin' Like She's Leavin!

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Live like I'm leaving
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