

A Reading from **Luke 20:1-8**

One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priest and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said? "Who gave you this authority?"

He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me: John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'from heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

So, they answered, "We don't know where it was from."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Jesus had come into the temple overturning the tables of the money lenders and merchants on his way in saying that they were inappropriate activities in the house of God. He then began teaching the Gospel. The leaders of the church were upset as he was destroying an important source of revenue, and more than that, they felt that he had no authority to be there preaching about anything as they hadn't granted him that authority.

Plus, they were looking for a way to get rid of him as he had stirred up resentments and attracted a large and growing following.

Nor were they happy with the question that Jesus posed to them, as John the Baptist was a rock star – the people of the region believed his frequent announcements that the Messiah was coming; and they believed that God had given him the authority to baptize.

So like TV pundits working for CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC, they posed an either-or question of their own making as if there were no other possible choices. In reality, the heads of the temple had no interest in the content of what Jesus was teaching any more than some pundits are interested in listening to information that does not reinforce their preconceived views.

I am reminded of Greta Thunberg, whose message is, pay attention to what the scientists are telling us and act immediately to address the causes of climate change. Ask yourself, by what authority does she speak at the United Nations? She has no academic degrees, hasn't published any peer reviewed papers in scientific journals, and, in fact, she hasn't even graduated from high school.

Greta recently said, "11,000 scientists signed a declaration of climate emergency. It's great that it gets media attention. But it's not like this the first time. Just last year, over 20000 scientists signed a similar warning. How many warnings do we need to treat this as a crisis?"

Her authority comes from her willingness to speak truth to power. Her activities began in August 2018, at age 15, when she started her once a week vigil outside the Swedish Parliament holding up a sign that said, in Swedish, "School strike for the climate."

Soon other students joined her in front of Parliament and by protesting in front of the city halls in their home communities. Collectively they decided to call their protest, School Strike for the Planet. This movement quickly expanded to other countries, and gaining tremendous media attention, Greta was asked to speak at the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Katowice, Poland.

Notable is that when Greta speaks, she tends to speak in a blunt straight forward style. She constantly urges the media to speak to other youth, not just her and, of course, to scientists. Further, she admonishes leaders for not doing their job and warns them against thinking of today's youth as the cleanup crew that's going to address the mess they've made. "This is all wrong," said Greta. "I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!"

Greta has received tremendous pushback. One recent twitter response was: Climate change: the made-up catastrophe used by globalists and socialists to install fear and guilt to tax, regulate, and remove freedoms while pretending to save the Planet.

People feel threatened by calls for change as their business and mode of life will be different. We have an emerging problem in Keene that's become full-blown in Lake Placid. In Lake Placid, and increasingly here, people are purchasing buildings in traditional residential neighborhoods so they can use them for short-term rentals, mini motels if you will. In so doing, they make their community much less affordable for people who work here as shopkeepers, teachers, members of the highway department, volunteer firefighters, and the like. The justification is, I can make money and have the right to do so; but at what price? Is making money the final arbitrator? Jesus clearly didn't think so.

Growing up, I enjoyed watching the Andy Griffith show, an American situation comedy television series that aired on CBS from October 3, 1960, to April 1, 1968, with a total of 249 half-hour episodes spanning over eight seasons. The show starred Andy Griffiths as Andy Taylor, the widowed sheriff of Mayberry, North Carolina, a fictional community of about 2,000 people. Lead characters were Andy's spinster Aunt Bee, who managed his household, his son Opie played by Ron Howard, and his excitable deputy sheriff played by Don Knotts.

Andy is known for very level-headed approach law enforcement and as a way of finding a path forward through the most difficult circumstance, often made far worse by his deputy. In the show, and in his personal life, Griffith approached problems with common-sense advice, mediation, and conciliation. What he was good at was listening and turning down the heat. His deputy felt heard, as was true of his son Opie, Aunt Bee, and others. As stated on the cover of today's bulletin, Andy's often expressed view was

"I firmly believe that in every situation, no matter how difficult, God extends grace greater than the hardship, and strength and peace of mind that can lead us to a place higher than where we were before" - a view that Griffiths believed and acted upon in life and manifested over the eight years the show ran.

That approach is a far cry from the showboating we see in Congress or in the media or by people unwilling to address climate change. It's OK to be scared; these are scary times made more so by our unwillingness to step back and look at our circumstances for what they are.

I saw a marvelous docudrama on Netflix the other day titled *The Best of Enemies*, that illustrated one method of pulling back from the brink, a cliff edge created through a mix of fear and self-interest. The film is based on the book *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South* by Osha Gray Davidson. The book portrays a rivalry between civil rights activist Ann Atwater and C. P. Ellis, the leader of the Klux Klux Klan in Durham, N.C. during the turbulent south in 1971. Ann had been fighting to get better housing conditions for black families, an effort thwarted by a local judge and the all-white juries he allowed. During this time, Atwater's daughter's school catches fire and is largely destroyed. The white community is afraid that the school board will place the Black children in their schools while the burnt school is rebuilt. C.P. Ellis is urged by them to stop such a possibility from occurring. The Black community in turn urges Ann Atwater to fight for their children's right to get an education.

The judge decides that the best way to solve this problem is to let the community come up with a solution through a charrette, hires a facilitator, and appoint Ellis and Atwater to co-chair the process, but as they hate each other neither wants to serve. Community pressure forces them to agree. Any adult in the community who wishes is allowed to be part of the process and from the large group that turns out, about seven are randomly selected from the audience to make the final vote on whatever plan comes out of the process with the judge agreeing to abide by their decision.

There are numerous events that get Atwater and Ellis, in particular, to step out of their role and preconceived notions and think in larger terms though understanding the circumstance of the other. There are concerted efforts by some to derail the process, such as members of the KKK that threaten members of the panel with bodily harm and destruction of their property if they do not vote a certain way, but ultimately Atwater and Ellis find within themselves the ability to join forces to achieve a higher good.

The key was getting to know the other person and finding common ground. Ellis took a social and financial hit for his willingness to take that step, and it was Atwater that then stepped in to protect his economic well-being through using her talents as an organizer to help him shift to a new business model.

Thirty years ago, this past Friday, I was standing on Arbat Stasse in Moscow, a kilometer-long pedestrian shopping and dining street in the center of old Moscow. I was in the city helping organize a forum on global issues by parliamentarians and religious, business, and science leaders

from around the world. On Arbat Strasse I noticed that very animated crowds of people had gathered across the street discussing whatever they were reading in Pravda, the leading newspaper in Russia which was displayed in large glass cases attached to walls near street corners so that anyone could read the content. I walked over to see what the fuss was about, and the pictures in the paper displayed images of people sitting on top of the Berlin Wall. They were shocked by the news that Berlin Wall was coming down, especially so because the Russian media had not aired the recent events leading up to it.

Six months later, Nelson Mandela was released from prison by then President of South Africa F. W. de Kerk with the agreement that they would work together to negotiate an end to apartheid. Within a couple years Mandela stepped into the presidency of South Africa; a radical change that, like the Berlin Wall, was done without a shot being fired. It struck me at the time, and I so think to this day that these two events and others of the time are deeply connected, that something larger than either allowed people to make hard choices. I believe the stimulus was people around the world seeing in newspapers and on TV the "blue marble" photo taken of Earth from space by the crew of Apollo 17 on December 7, 1972, the most reproduced picture in history.

People looking at that photograph saw no barriers between countries, rather they saw a blue, green, brown, and white ball, our home, floating in space with nothing else around, the message is that we are all here together. I don't think that the totalitarian governments of the time saw this photograph as the threat it was to their rule, and of consequences allowed

people of all walks of life and circumstance see our fragile home floating in a universe of darkness.

The shock and awe of that image have passed, but the deeper authority, the voice within us, remains. Greta is connected to that voice. Jesus is the manifestation of that voice, as is Buddha and others. We have deeper truth that all of us are being called to hear and act upon. We are not being asked to stand in judgment of others satisfied that our view is the right and proper one, but to rather reach across the barriers that divide us for the greater good of all life and future life on this Planet. We are asked to connect with our enemies, to not hide under words complaints about process as the leaders of the temple threw at Jesus but seek the truth of our reality and act accordingly.

We are being called to reject the winner take all approach, and, in its place, to move forward caring for the least of us. This is not an easy path. God never said the path would be easy, only that he would be with us no matter how dark and vexing the moment.

Or, as Gandalf in Lord of the Rings responded to Frodo, who was bemoaning that he was living in a time with so many difficult challenges, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to do is decide what to do with the time that is given us."

God is here to help guide us forward. It's time to set aside the Kool-Aid and recognize and take stock of our reality. Good news is that are not alone, we

here have our fellow members of this Congregation, and God's grace has been extended to carry us through the challenges that we must face to create a better future for the generations and wildlife to follow.

Face this day with courage, love, and joy.

Blessing

“Live your truth. Express your love. Share your enthusiasm. Take action towards your dreams. Walk your talk. Dance and sing to your music. Embrace your blessings. Make today and everyday worth remembering.”