

**Sermon Notes:** Oct 4, 2020 **Focus:** Matthew, Philippians, and Trojan Horses. [All Readings](#)

**Matthew, Jesus tells a story** There is a wealthy landowner who goes on a long trip and the workers stage a rebellion. The owner does not bother to come back to deal with the conflict but sends many emissaries. Finally, he sends his son, who is then killed. Jesus is telling a story about the people (the land). The workers who stage a rebellion are the religious authorities. God is the landowner, and the workers don't care what the landowner is trying to accomplish with the land (God's people). The land is not a neutral property. God is the manager, the people are God's creation, and the leaders are stewards.

Jesus is playing with conventions of the day. It was universally understood that a rebellion of workers would have been met with a swift coalition of landowners armed to the teeth in order to kick the workers off. Weirdly, this story is about how God in God's patience does not immediately kick off the tenants (religious leaders). God bends over backward to let the tenants stay even sending the son. This would not happen in real life. Real life would have been far more violent and led to the tenants being carted off the land dead or alive. That is the point - God does not act according to convention. God is not a wimp but is far more patient than a regular landowner.

This parable is late installment in a series of clashes with the temple authorities. Jesus will get into fights with Pharisees in Chapter 22 (Pharisees are different from temple authorities, but I won't go into detail right now.) In chapter 21, the authorities ask, "who told you that flipping our money-making tables over to become a popular attraction is ok?" Jesus responds that children and infants do. Right after, he curses a fig tree outside the temple, which is a clear dig on those who are supposed to be fruitful but are barren - temple leaders. Back at the temple, they ask again, "Who the heck do you think you are? you are acting awfully big for your britches." He throws out John's baptism to ask them question of where authority comes from. They decide it's better not to answer. Jesus then tells a parable about "two sons" saying the respectable authorities don't listen to God, but reviled tax collectors do. And... then we get to today's story.

So, the land in today's story is the people. The tenants are the religious leaders. The leaders think all authority over the people of Israel are theirs by right. Bottom line of the story for us is - Love people, especially ones who can't challenge you. Your power and privilege are tools to use for the good of the land (others).

**Philippians** Paul, in prison, remembers with gratitude the kindness that they have shown him. He waxes long about humility and sacrifice. All his talk of dying and sacrifice is meant to underline the point that real sacrifice is living for others, not dying a martyr's death. Paul is not afraid of death. In fact, he seems to romanticize it. The real gift, the real joy, and the real sacrifice is not going to the pearly gates but living for the welfare of others.

**Trojan Horses** I have been thinking a lot about our country lately, as I am sure you have too. We live in a moment that begs us to rethink caretaking. Stewardship and caretaking have always been part of St. Timothy's culture. It is true not only in our current stewardship season, but also year-round. This moment is available for us to reaffirm love expressed in community.

St. Timothy's is choosing "we" over "me." Ironically, today, we know each other better than we have in a long time. Our distance has forced us to reconnect. Your vestry regularly calls the directory. I know the needs and joys of St. Timothy's now far better than I did in 2019. Another "we" over "me" story comes from the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg; may her memory be a blessing.

**RBG's view of *we over me*** "I ask no favor for my sex; all I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks." She said this years before George Floyd (a completely different context.) Before coming on the supreme court, she was a shrewd litigator focused on women's rights. Her pragmatism led her to cases that sometimes did not have a clear connection to women. In a man's world, she found cases that *seemed* to help only men, but resulted in more gender equality and equity. Her guerilla warfare style was to engage the world as it was, and then use its assumptions to flip the script.

She took weird cases so often, that many feminists at the time did not like her. She got really good at sending Trojan horses to court. My favorite trojan horse is the "thirsty boys" case. In the podcast episode called "sex appeal," *More Perfect* does a great job of [telling the story of Craig v Boren, a lawsuit about beer](#)

It's the early 1970's in Stillwater, OK. The Honk and Holler is a drive thru liquor store. Some frat boys are chaffing at the different ages that men and women can buy beer. Near OSU (Oklahoma State University), the owner of this fine establishment agrees to help the frat boys fight this particular law. The main frat boy is Curtis Craig – the Craig of Craig v Boren. In the seventies in OK, an 18-year-old woman could buy beer, but only a 21-year-old man could – because women were more 'responsible.'

RBG did *not* argue this case in the supreme court – it is more interesting than that. She was very interested in the case as a vehicle for women's equality. RBG was working for the ACLU at time. She offered assistance to the "thirsty boys" lawyer, a self-described male chauvinist. She was supremely aware that the Oklahoma law diminished not only men, but also women because of the assumptions around female fragility and propriety. The lawyer, Fred Gilbert, was not a particularly skilled litigator, even with RBG's team helping him. He showed up at the Supreme Court interrupting justices and sporting combat boots and basically whiffing the whole thing.

RBG, however, was arguing a case later *that same day* in the highest court. The justices still shaking their heads over the Gilbert debacle, asked RBG what she thought about the thirsty boy's case and the train wreck they had just experienced. She managed to convince the court to rule not only on her case, but also in favor of Craig v Boren to overturn the beer law. This trojan horse was a pioneer case which gave gender discrimination legal weight.

**Why do I tell you all this?** I am interested in us finding pragmatic ways to be deeply rooted spiritual beings, shrewd actors in the world, and committed secret agents of mercy. RBG loved trojan horse strategies to make the world kinder and more equitable place, and I want to be a more like her. I want to learn guerrilla style mercy, loving people before they know what hit 'em.

**Todd**