

**April 2, 2017**

**Sermon: “Lord, Lord” Christians Pr. Clay Oglesbee**

**Texts: Matthew 7:21-29**

We have a little short story from the Colombian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The story goes like this. After three days of gray, cold rains that fell on their home on the coast, Pelayo and his wife, Elisenda, discovered a very old man with enormous wings, lying in the mud of their courtyard, exhausted, groaning, and unable to get up again. “He was dressed like a rag-picker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and a very few teeth left in his mouth, and his pitiable condition of a drenched great-grandfather had taken away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud.”

Since they could not understand him, at first the couple thought he was a shipwrecked sailor (conveniently ignoring the fact that he had wings!) But then a neighbor woman said he must be an angel who had come looking for a sick child. Other villagers came, and everyone was confused. No one knew what to do with him. Some wanted to club him to death, whatever he was; some thought he was a sort of circus animal, not a supernatural creature. Others believed he might become mayor of the world, a commanding general, or the breeding stud for a race of winged human beings. Pelayo dragged him out of the mud and locked him up in the chicken coop with the hens. The local priest,

Father Gonzaga, offered his solution: he would write the Pope for a verdict.

In the meantime, Elisenda decided she should charge five cents admission to everyone who wanted to see the angel—or whatever he was. People came from all over the world to see the angel and to seek the things they needed from an angel, but the angel took no part. The family prospered a bit. Eventually, people's interest faded, and they went looking for more exciting attractions. Time went by. The very old man became as familiar to the family as a stinking, aging, old dog. They let him out of the chicken coop, but then he was always underfoot in the house. "The angel went dragging himself about here and there like a stray, dying man."

Then, one mysterious day, the very old man began to fly. It was hard for him, but eventually he gained height "with the risky flapping of a senile vulture". At last, he passed over the houses and out to sea. And Elisenda, who had been observing all this from her kitchen, watched until, as Garcia Marquez wrote, "he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea."

I have been thinking and praying about this story and about this text from Matthew. Garcia Marquez makes it ambiguous and uncertain whether the very old man with enormous wings was an angel or not, but what he does not make ambiguous or uncertain is the way that

people respond to Mystery when it is inconvenient, muddy, stinking, decrepit, in the way, unprofitable, or annoying. This led me to ask myself: What if God came to us as such an unsatisfactory angel? What if God's presence in our lives were at best a nuisance, an irritant, something that smelled bad and made us impatient? Would we continue to love God as God?

In our passage in Matthew, Jesus speaks to a crowd and warns them that there are a great many people who say, "Lord, Lord", without meaning it. They say they are faithful, but it is not clear what their faithfulness is to or for. A Christian or some other person of faith may say, "Lord, Lord," and mean it, and mean to do God's will, and yet may so confine and restrict, and set boundaries around God and God's will, that in the end they prune and narrow and constrict God's presence and way to something that is always preferred, convenient, prudent, common-sense and pleasant. Not to something that stinks, and suffers, and disgusts, and seemingly cannot rise in our esteem, or fly to the heavens.

Think of this, though. Who is "God with us", Emmanuel? The deepest answer to this has always been in Isaiah 53. The one we call Lord is described in this way: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity...He was

despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases...He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.” Isn't this the very old man?

So, here is my question. Do we love God, or do we just love the benefits of God? Do we love glory, peace, and calm, or do we love the way God is, and the way life is, when they show themselves to us with all the mud, the exhaustion, and the stench of reality upon them? Is the God to whom we say, “Lord, Lord” only for our good moments, our best behavior, our happiest relationships, our prospering and successful times, or is the actual Lord more real than that, a more all-encompassing presence, particularly noticeable in the world when there is suffering? The 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic devotional writer and bishop, Francis De Sales once wrote, “Wait a little while, and you will see if it is God whom (a person) loves. Unfortunately (for many), as soon as the delight and satisfaction he took in love (for God) leaves him and dryness comes, he will give up all that....Many (people) indeed take no delight in divine love unless it is candied over with the sugar of some sensible sweetness....If the sweetness could be separated from the love, such persons would leave the love and take only the sweetness....Happy is the heart that loves God with no other pleasure but that which it takes in pleasing God.”

So, when we say, “Lord, Lord”, who are we really addressing, and what do we really desire? Do we want

what God wants, or do we want God to want what we want? Is it alright with us for God to sometimes show up as a life-changing annoyance?