

Pentecost 17 Proper 22 – Year C – Track 2 - 10-6-2019

Last Sunday I cautioned us all to “mind the gap” – to *fill* the gap that separates us from one another and God -by living out our baptismal promises... And I think, like the disciples, our inner response is – how can we possibly do that? We *want to* respect all persons, we want to live the Christ-life within us – but how can we do that? In the verses immediately preceding today’s passage from Luke’s gospel, Jesus has just told the disciples that they must forgive someone no matter how many times they sin against them. How can they or we do that? Like the disciples, we might cry out, “Increase our faith!”

And Jesus responds, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed...” Jesus is telling the disciples – and us – that we have missed the point. We think we need “*more* faith” to do the impossible, to be endlessly forgiving or to live out those lofty baptismal promises. But as Dennis Sanders, writing in *Christian Century*, puts it: “It’s not about having enough faith. Being faithful is doing what God would have us do in the world even when we think our faith is incomplete and doesn’t measure up.”¹

Part of our problem is, or has been, perhaps, a misunderstanding of what faith means. For many, it is about *assent*. I will give my intellectual *assent* to something. I will *believe* in something – the changing of water into wine, Jonah being swallowed by a whale, the universe being created in 7 days, or some other particular doctrine – no matter what science or my own intellect tells me. I will just *believe*.

For others, faith is about trust. Think of learning to swim or float in water. Until one stops fighting out of fear, until you can relax and trust in the buoyancy of the water, you can never float on water. Faith, here, is about trust. Faith is about our *trust* in God. Will we continue to trust, even when we are afraid? Think of the disciples caught in a boat in a storm, and Jesus’ question: Where is your faith?

Finally, faith can also be seen in terms of fidelity. Faith, here, is about being faithful to God, in the way one is faithful to a spouse. And the opposite of this kind of faith is *infidelity* – In terms of our relationship with God, the opposite of this kind of faith is idolatry.

Again, Dennis Sanders says, “God doesn’t need us to believe enough. God calls us to be faithful—to seek to do God’s work in the world. Faithfulness is about being a witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus; it is about trusting in God’s faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering.”

Our first reading from Habakkuk is part lament, part prayer. Habakkuk is a contemporary of Jeremiah and is writing at a time of devastation. The Babylonians have destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. They have taken some of the people off to exile, and the rest have scattered. He essentially goes on a rant against God. How can you not respond to our pleas for justice? Why do you open my eyes to see injustice – and then do nothing? But then Habakkuk says he will wait.

“I will stand at my watchpost,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.”

And then God *does* answer:

there is still a vision for the appointed time; Write the vision;
make it plain – Write it in big letters - on tablets, - on something permanent -
so that a runner may read it. SO that anyone passing by cannot miss it. So that YOU do not miss it as you hurry by.
If it seems to tarry, wait for it; - BE FAITHFUL.

The psalm carries the same theme:

- Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; *
do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
2 For they shall soon wither like the grass, *
and like the green grass fade away.
3 Put your trust in the LORD and do good; *

4 Take delight in the LORD, *
and he shall give you your heart's desire.

5 Commit your way to the LORD and put your trust in him, *
and he will bring it to pass.

7 Be still before the LORD *
and wait patiently for him.

To put all this in context for us today – there is trouble all around. Injustice abounds. How can we go on like this? We go on by faith – not an intellectual faith, but a faith that trusts in the fidelity of God.

Ralph Waldo Emerson famously put it this way, “All I have seen teaches me to trust the creator for all I have not seen.”

A poem, inscribed on the wall of a concentration camp in Cologne and discovered shortly after the end of World War II, gives yet another testimony:

*I believe in the sun even when it's not shining.
I believe in love even when I don't feel it.
I believe in God even when He is silent.*

To quote Dennis Sanders again, “God doesn’t need us to believe *enough*. God calls us to be faithful—to seek to do God’s work in the world. Faithfulness is about being a witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus; it is about trusting in God’s faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering.”

“God calls us to be faithful – to seek to do God’s work in the world.” And the implication of that for us as Episcopalian Christians is born as those pesky and demanding promises we make in our baptismal covenant. As Mary proclaimed in the Magnificat, which we hear echoes of in our hymns today, we believe in a God who raises up the lowly, pours eyesight on the blind, promotes the insecure, and helps the stranger in distress. And we believe in the Incarnation – that God took flesh in Jesus the Christ. We proclaim, in the mystery of faith, that Christ IS risen – is still present. If we did not believe in an Incarnational God, we could continue to look for God to act from outside. But our belief in Incarnation demands that we allow God to work from within.

Hear, my friends, the words of Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body now but yours, no feet, no hands, no eyes but yours.

Sarah Dylan Breuer says, “But faith is not about intellectual projection and assessment; it is not an intellectual analogue to that process we go through to build and maintain hubris. Faith is relationship -- a relationship of trust, of allegiance. When Jesus talks about "faith," he's not talking about what you do in your head; he's talking about what you do with your hands and your feet, your wallet and your privilege, your power and your time. Faith in Jesus is not shown by saying or thinking things about him, but by following him.²

Habakkuk is waiting. Those having their foodstamp benefits cut are waiting. People bearing the generational wounds of slavery and genocide are waiting, waiting for God to act.

And God is waiting for us to live out our faith in the Incarnation. God is waiting for us to be faithful to the baptismal covenant we have made. Let us take our mustard-seed, miniscule-sized faith and take one step at a time. Let us keep trying to live what we proclaim, keep being faithful, even as we keep celebrating God's faithfulness.

Amen.

[Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4](#)

[Psalm 37:1-10](#)

[2 Timothy 1:1-14](#)

[Luke 17:5-10](#)

¹ Dennis Sanders <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/october-6-ordinary-27c-luke-175-10?code=nRmY4DWR3AQnhvU6Snqr>

² Sarah Dylan Breuer Dylan's Lectionary Blog for Proper 22C www.SarahLaughed.net