

Pentecost 5, 6.27.2021

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Lamentations. 3:22-33; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

“Do not fear, only believe”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Today’s message begins with an appeal. Perhaps you noticed the baker’s rack in the Gathering Place when you arrived at church today. The Social Ministry Committee has begun a food drive for Loaves and Fishes, which will run through the month of July. This food drive is described on the yellow insert in today’s bulletin. Hunger in children and youth in Mecklenburg County is an issue for approximately 188,000 young people. Though children and youth receive breakfasts and lunches when school is in session, during the summer many young people and their families are without enough to eat.

St. Mark’s members and friends have been very generous with donations of food for Loaves and Fishes, especially this past year during the pandemic when food pantries have been extremely challenged. Today’s yellow insert contains a “shopping list” of needed food items. Donations may be brought to the church Monday through Thursday, 10 am to 2 pm, or on Sunday mornings when you come to worship. Let’s continue our tradition of generosity in helping others out of our own abundance.

Today’s reading from 2 Corinthians is tailor made for today’s appeal. Paul was collecting an offering from the Gentile churches of Macedonia for the Jewish church in Jerusalem, which had been hit hard by famine. The churches of Macedonia, too, were not well off, yet they gave so that others would know God’s grace. What is important to understand is that the church in Jerusalem was Jewish while the churches of Macedonia were Gentile; there was misunderstanding between them; and they did not always see themselves as sisters and brothers in Christ. For Paul, gathering an offering for the Jewish Jerusalem church was meant to help them see that the Gentile churches saw them as family, cared about them, and that they shared the same Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul’s message which has come down to us today, as told in Galatians is about remembering the poor (Gal 2:10), about love for neighbor (Gal 5:14), and about bearing one another’s burdens in fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). In today’s reading from 2 Corinthians, Paul points to Jesus as the model of generosity, writing, “*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*” Jesus emptied himself becoming a servant so that the world might know God’s grace and

love. Martin Luther used the image of Jesus taking off his cloak of righteousness and placing it upon every person who calls out to him in faith. Jesus gives us his treasure of grace so that rich in grace, we might share God's grace with others.

The church in Jerusalem was the "Mother Church" of all Christians because Christian mission began from Jerusalem in the work of Jesus and his disciples. For Paul, Gentile Christians were also to follow the example of Jesus, who became poor so that others might become rich in grace. The Doctrine of Grace isn't simply about what we receive from God; we receive grace so that we can share with others the grace we have received from God. Grace is given so that it might be shared. Giving is about personal gratitude to God for all of God's benefits to us.

Yet today many people ask, "Where is God?" The modern 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century question about "the death of God" that, as modern people, we have inherited is often meant to mean that humanity had "grown up" and is no longer in need of the tutelage of God. Modern human beings are to rely upon rationality and science. Such questions about God are answered by communities of faith, who like St. Mark's, remember the poor because Christ himself became poor; who remember refugees because the Holy Family became refugees fleeing Herod and living in Egypt. Jesus suffered hunger and thirst; he knew what it meant to be an outsider, someone in need. Jesus continues to suffer with those in need, so that we too, might bear their burdens as Christ bears our own burdens.

*Grace is given for the purpose of sharing with others.* Where is God? God is here in this place, in your hearts through faith. God sends us out to feed, clothe and visit others so that they will know God exists in their lives. The Loaves and Fishes food pantry is so named because God always provides more than enough for all of us. Abundance is the nature of God's grace.

We learn the generous acts of God toward us over a lifetime. Faith is understood best through living in trust toward God and generous service toward others. The first lesson for today reads, "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*" When we rely upon God we live generously with others, knowing how God continues to generously bless us with grace.

Some lessons in life are learned best at a young age. Who would not want to begin school at a young age? Who would not want to begin learning mathematics or another language at a young age? Today's first lesson reads, "*It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth...*" The yoke of faith is easy and the burden is light. Of course, some of us grew into faith in Jesus as adults, and some of us grew into faith while they were young, but we all continue the journey of faith over a lifetime.

Today we celebrate the baptism of Olivia Gabriella Iannelli, who will join the household of God through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. We welcome Olivia Gabriella into the family of St. Mark's and look forward to watching her grow in faith. The human journey of faith is the journey of a lifetime. Today's readings all remind us that faith is all we really need. God's grace causes faith to dwell in us, and from faith flow love, good works and compassion. Through faith, we no longer fear, *but believe* in God's healing and transforming presence. Faith completes us. Faith makes us well.

Martin Luther argued that nowhere do we see the power of God more active and present than in the baptism of a small child. The child can, as yet, do nothing for themselves. Baptism is a sign of God's promise alive in water and the word. It is the promise of God in water and the word that saves in Baptism. As adults we try to get through life with only our own power, often forgetting God. We craft our resumes and CVs to highlight our achievements, often forgetting the grace of God and the love of many who have stood behind us lifting us up as we have grown as human beings. As Olivia Gabriella is baptized today, I also invite all the baptized to reaffirm your own baptism in joining together in reading the Profession of Faith.

Faith causes us to reach out to touch Jesus, like the woman who, seeking healing, touched the hem of Jesus' garment. Faith causes us to bring our concerns for others to Jesus like Jairus, who sought healing for his daughter. Faith pushes us beyond the limits of our own power to seek the power of God. Faith lifts us beyond our own weakness, so that we might lift up others. Faith makes us well. Jesus told the woman, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.*"

The first reading for today contains the words, "*Great is your faithfulness.*" It is also the closing hymn for today. Both Jairus and the woman knew that God was faithful and could be relied upon. They reached out in faith for healing. The greatest miracle in these stories isn't necessarily the healing, but rather the faith to reach out, asking Jesus for help. In the crowd, at home, at work, in prayer we can also reach out to Jesus, who is the "*Healer of Our Every Ill.*"

Like the woman, who in "fear and trembling" spoke to Jesus, we also come to Jesus with outstretched hands. We fold them in prayer seeking help for ourselves and others, We hold them outstretched to receive the true presence of Jesus in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. We go from this place to stretch out our hands in service for others. We carry bags of groceries to give to others so they will not be hungry. We share food, time, and prayers for others because faith makes us well; faith makes us loving and compassionate toward others.

I used to teach American Church History at the Lutheran Seminary in Tokyo, and taught a

section about the history of media in the church - from radio, to television, to the internet. Right after WWI the radio boom took off in the United States. Initially there were no large radio stations as we know them today. There were just many small local stations. Even local churches had broadcast antennas, and they advertised their radio programming on their church signs. A church in a small town in Kentucky had a sign, which read at the very bottom, "And remember, God is always broadcasting." Long before the era of radios, TV and the internet, people like Jairus and the woman seeking healing knew this truth: "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*" God is always broadcasting. God is always available. God is faithful.

Jesus' words "*Do not fear, only believe*" are meant to help us see that faith is how we move from fear to confidence that God is with us. "*Do not fear, only believe*" – faith is the gift that makes us whole, heals and helps us live as signs of God's faithfulness in the world.

Each of us had someone who taught us to pray, someone who taught us to rely upon God's grace in the sacraments, and someone who taught us to serve and help others. Faith doesn't just happen as if by magic. Someone embodied faith in Jesus to you. It could have been a parent, a spouse, a grandparent, a friend, a teacher, a pastor. Someone became poor by giving of themselves, so that we might know the riches of Christ. Like Olivia Gabriella, who will not remember her baptism, I do not remember my own baptism, but I know Jesus through faith because of the many people who have shared and incarnated Jesus to me.

"*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.*" God is always broadcasting grace, love, and compassion. Take hold of God's grace again today, to love and serve others in the world. Live as a sign of light in the darkness of the world. "*Do not fear, only believe.*" Amen.