

Sermon 10 5 & 6 19

Oh, I was all set for this sermon. You betcha! I was all set to cleverly avoid this gospel. I find it distasteful. Which is why God made me deal with it.

First Jesus flicks aside the disciples demand for more faith. He points out that they don't need more faith. They have plenty of faith. You don't need much for salvation. Look at the mustard seeds on the tip of this finger. We need less than that! We just need to *exercise* our faith. Work it!

And then Jesus says to his disciples, "Who do you think you are?!? Would you thank a slave for doing what he was supposed to be doing anyway? Do you expect God to fall all over you and thank you for doing what you're supposed to be doing anyway? Who do you think you are?"

Now most of us are not used to a servant/master relationship, let alone a slave/master relationship, so most of us cannot even comprehend Jesus' directive - "Don't go looking for gratitude - you're only doing what you're supposed to be doing!" However accurate that may be, it still grates.

I want God to be grateful to me for being a Christian! I want God's love for me to be payback for loving him. We keep looking for an equal relationship with God. Not gonna happen. There's no payback factor with God. What God is saying here is, "I love you.

Yes, I want to be your friend. I want to walk beside you. But let's not forget: I'm God and you're not!"

Every once in a while, we just need to be reminded of that. Especially if we're being whiny disciples. I think that's what our Gospel is about.

Our first reading could have been written yesterday! "How long will I cry for help and you will not listen?" How often have we thought, "God, are you paying any attention at all? The whole world's going to hell on a sled and you don't seem to care!"

God did answer Habakkuk. He sent a vision and he told him to write it down so clearly that someone running by could see it! Like one of those guys waving around a John 3:16 poster at a football game. Whoever is running by doesn't even have to slow down. The final verse in this reading says it all. "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith." "The righteous live by their faith." Easy to say. Hard to do. Do we live by our faith? Our psalm instructs us to "Put your trust in the Lord and do good." These are simple instructions. Wonder why God has to keep repeating them!?

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." Aaack! That's the problem! That is what is soooo hard to do! to be patient! Who here has a problem with patience? (a show of hands) God knows I do!

And our final verses from the psalm:

“Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil.” So hard to do! Sooo hard to do! We’d much rather carry on, have our righteous temper tantrums! Waaaaaaaah! But we only hurt ourselves. Anger is exhausting and it wastes time. As hard as it is, we need to trust in God. God tells us that evildoers will be taken care of. We need to wait upon the Lord. We need to be patient and trusting. “...the righteous live by their faith.” *We need to live by our faith.* It always comes down to that, doesn’t it?

Paul speaks with absolute faith as he languishes in prison when he writes to his friend Timothy, “for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.” You see, *Paul never actually met Jesus, not in life.* Just like us. He never met Jesus except in visions and dreams, and yet he knew Jesus as his friend, as his teacher and counselor. Paul entrusted his very soul to Jesus, and that trust was as real to him as if you or I were to entrust our very lives to someone. It was as real to him as it can be for us. “Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”

As Paul is approaching the end of his life, he is becoming more and more aware of eternity. Paul tells Timothy and us to care for our immortal souls, and to seek the help of the Holy Spirit. I think

this might be the most important part of this reading for us. Paul acknowledges that the Holy Spirit lives within each of us. It lives within each of us to be our helper and guide throughout our lives, if we only let it, if we only acknowledge it. Can we believe that? Are we paying attention? The Holy Spirit is God's constant, everlasting gift to us. It is often called the Comforter. We don't ever need to feel alone. We can be comforted.

We have a hard time imagining the Holy Spirit, because we don't think of it as having a personality. So it's hard to imagine. It's hard for us to imagine what the Holy Spirit might look like. We can imagine God - maybe as an old guy with a beard, a sort of grandfatherly type. Jesus is pretty well established for us as a person, so there's not a lot of question there.

But the Holy Spirit... The Holy Spirit is difficult to imagine - an angel-like being? A diaphanous figure that you can't quite see, out of focus? That's how the Holy Spirit appears in the movie "The Shack." Or maybe a dove like we see in some paintings.

I always think of the Holy Spirit as a figure that is so close to us that we can't quite focus on her or him or it - so close - but always on the periphery of our vision.

It's like that test at the eye doctor's. One of your eyes is covered with a patch and you're supposed to look straight ahead and focus between four lights, and you need to press down on the

clicker when other lights flash. O! My! God! I can do it, but it drives me nuts! (Not very relaxing.) It's like the Holy Spirit is flashing around in my peripheral vision, but not enough so I can really see it. But I follow instructions and stare straight ahead and click away at every flash!

That's my image of the Holy Spirit - flickering away on the edges of my sight, *on the edge of my very self*. This gift God has given us to care for us, to be our companion.

God has given us love, the treasure of our souls, and the Holy Spirit as our constant companion and guide, living within us. How can we avoid trusting in God? Who *do* we think we are?