

Sermon for 13 June 2021 @ BethesdaUMCBaltimore.org

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20 (*Insert*); 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

“As they were able to hear it...”

Like last Sunday, today's scriptures don't give us any time to settle down and connect with what's gone before. There we were just learning that Israel was going to get what it wanted ... a king, like all the other nations ... even though the prophet and last of the judges, Samuel, whom we've followed since before he was born, when his mother Hannah promised to dedicate him to the Lord for life... even though Samuel, now old and trusted by all Israel, was opposed to Israel's having a king; and even though God Almighty didn't think kindly of the idea either, but insisted on giving them their way. “Go ahead, give them a king,” God told the aged wise man, priest and prophet as he was.

Now, today, the king, Saul, is on his way out, a failed experiment, still in power and dangerous to everybody around him ... but the king idea has stuck, and a new one is to be surreptitiously anointed in clear daylight, to change history and set a pattern no one had expected for Israel ... little David, with his gifts and failings.

It's like the family we married into, or the great-uncle we never heard of. Life is dealing us situations and issues we never prepared for ... Totally ancient stories and opposing facts are full in our face, and life ... scripture ... is insisting, “Deal with it! Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. This is your time, this is where your faith gets tested and developed. You can't pass it by. It's a pass or fail situation that will mark your future and those of others around you,” scripture is insisting.

Psalm 20 elaborates with illustrations of power ... blessing a king, hearing a king pray, watching what big changes happen when things change course ... as we've been watching these last few years, and these last few months, so drastically.

Paul's commentary on life with Christ, life with other believers, life that melds physical events and spiritual characteristics, spells out these themes still more personally and poignantly. “Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord,” Paul confesses ... and then goes on to say we live in both ways through faith in Christ who died and rose to new life. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

Which brings us to the Gospel, and the parables of the seed, and the sower; the secrecy of it all, and the facts of uncertainty and lack of control ... of trusting in God's love, and learning God's humbling lessons of love and justice, over and over, not because we fit ourselves into careers and acquisitions of power as our age thinks of purpose and success ... but because bit by bit, by ourselves and in groups of trustworthy friends, we get good work done for God and for our neighbors and our time.

How much of this do I learn from the way I handle what comes to me, and how much depends on things beyond my control? Do you believe signs occur that you either see or you don't? Are you developing a sixth sense that helps improve things around you? Have you been with the disciples sometimes, getting better acquainted with fair play and serious things like sympathy and prayerful support? On the other hand, does it help to look back and learn from mistakes, to realize you've been with the crowd who just saw but didn't see what the Lord was teaching, and only later did his wisdom come into your heart and mind?

The word for today, from these scriptures, is about the combination of seeing and missing that life is, I believe. So much of what's happening these days is scary, and so much is thrilling and hopeful. Give up, let go, rest awhile and watch God is still working. And, get busy, do what you know, or seriously suspect, is important not just for you, but for others you are just now learning to see and hear. Your light is important; let it shine. Your time is holy in Jesus; rest in it, and also move into it afresh with the new insights God gives to each of us at every stage of our development.

It's an unending surprise, this life. It's also very familiar and trustworthy as we walk with the Truth that makes us free. God give us the grace, and the courage, to apply ourselves to the process, more and more, as we learn more about faith, and hope, and charity, with our Lord Jesus.

Amen.