

Sermon for 7 August 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16;
Luke 12:32-40

“Daily faith”

How do they get there?

You all are anthropologists. You are historians. What brings us to this gift of criticism that makes us human? How do we go from God’s power over us to love of us?

Lots of the first pages of scripture read like a tussle between an older brother and us. Scripture has us sidling up to the Almighty with praise, or with God furiously casting us aside or domineering over us and declaring how things are and will be.

Then, all of a sudden, we realize there’s a weird, incredible kind of equality between us and the Other. Beneath all the awesome differences there is interdependence, and how things turn out depend as much on our cooperation as on our dependence.

We’ve started out with Amos’s stark conditions and insistences: “Care for the poor; be fair; darkness comes because you are careless and selfish.” Then, overnight, we’ve learned God weeps for love of us, clings to us even as we cast the Other aside. That comes back today in Isaiah ... and now Luke tells us we can receive whatever we need if we will simply ask, and cooperate.

What kind of a world is this, anyway?

I listened, the other night, to news reporters interviewing one of Biden’s spokespeople. Over and over, even through the banter and the defensiveness, something profoundly beautiful, something that keeps us dreaming of a country, a power, that seeks and stands for fairness and mutual benefits. Nancy Pelosi has a right to visit Taiwan if she wants to. As a former senator, the President knows elected officials are free to visit abroad and in their own right to represent the people of our land. We only insist on decent respect, we do not play for separate statehood or interfere with China’s injustices, even as we strongly criticize their injustices among their own citizenry.

How did we get that far? Whence this dream of mutual welfare, worldwide?
How can Jesus be so sure the master will serve US?

Last week I heard Matthew Fox, that former Roman priest who insists true faith teaches this is a good world, we live in a gorgeous universe, the secret fact of everything is of original blessing, not just forgiveness but goodness. He asked, in one of his daily meditations, "Don't you want to do your part to make this earth a better place while it lasts?"

In this country we make a lot over standing alone and making something of ourselves. Hard as it is, we still stand up for independence and hustle. Scripture is forever going beyond that and asking that we celebrate what already IS, and build on the glory that lies in charity and understanding and listening and discovering the beauty that flies out of its box when we cooperate, not only through our different approaches and outlooks, but through what lies beyond all our understanding so far. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Recently I listened to a woman who's written of how the Presidents have managed to survive all the tension and terror they dealt with. Lincoln told jokes. Truman and Eisenhower played poker. Roosevelt played with his stamp collection, a habit he began in order to escape the eye of an incredibly domineering mother. And she pointed out, again and again, how all these past leaders lived through times that were in their own way as awesomely uncertain as, by comparison, ours appear to us.

We have a faith that is so ordinary, so regular, so plain and simple, that all of our technology and knowledge can't stack up against its solid reliability. Don't forget that! Rejoice and be exceeding glad in this Book that keeps exploring and exposing goodness all around and within everything. Never forget that we have a sacred trust, a divinely devised obligation, and objective, to leave this hour, and this meeting, and this turn of events, better than we found it. That's what we're for. That's what Amos and Hosea and Isaiah have been shouting at us these last few Sundays. All this noise and angst isn't the main theme. We've got to find some way to get that across in this liminal moment between what's ever been and what never yet has come to pass. Just the fact we are exposing the horror and pain of being black is enough to teach us the dignity of being recognized and encouraged even a little more. Example after example of fresh horror keeps getting matched with awesome creativity and new ways to be kind and find fresh rescue from depression and anger and fighting and jealousy and ... just faith. Just day by day .. Just you and me and our little ship, sailing on this vast ocean, here, have a hand, take more for yourself, and stay awake so the next risk doesn't prove fatal in this batch of lies and trouble that's peering around the next bend. Diligence is always needed. Keep the faith. Daily.

Amen.