

Genesis 15:1-6
Psalm 33:12-22
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

Sermon August 11th, 2019

God Gives Us the Kingdom

One common theme that runs throughout the readings this morning is an invitation to put our faith in God even when life gets hard. And wow it gets hard sometimes doesn't it? Some of us here are dealing with cancer or some other life-altering illness or condition. Many days we are left feeling fatigue/exhaustion. Our hearts filled with so much uncertainty as we await the success of a treatment. Sometimes the pain and grief become so hard to bear. We are left feeling overwhelmed whenever we experience a new symptom or the return of an old symptom that we thought we had under control. Doing everything we can to support our loved one through this even when we feel like running to a corner. Falling on our knees. Crying uncontrollably. Praying for relief. Trying to hope even when despair is staring us in the face. Trying to stay strong even when everything inside us is falling apart. Life can be so hard.

Some of us here have faced mental health challenges. Wondering if people are judging us. Filled with guilt and shame over letting our loved ones down. Struggling to afford the services we need. Feeling completely out of control. Exhausted from crying. Scared. Praying for a day where we can feel happy, satisfied with life. Wanting so badly to be there, but getting so frustrated at how our loved one's mental health issues are impacting our life. Then feeling completely selfish for thinking that. Life can be so hard.

Some of us here have suffered grief from the death of a loved one or the breakdown of a relationship or the loss of a job. We try to live on, but struggle with that empty feeling inside that seems to hang on. We want to forgive, but can't seem to let go of that anger that stews deep in our hearts. Exhausted and deflated as another day goes by without a job. Another interview that didn't pan out. Tired of breaking down in tears. Tired of people asking us how we are doing. Tired of the challenges that come with now living alone. Trying to figure out how to put the pieces back together in our life. Life can be so hard.

Abram and Sarai have prayed and prayed to have a family. As the years pass their frustration grows. Their hurt deepens. Despair sets in. Sarai feels disconnected from Abram. From her community, as she is unable to do the one thing that will give her meaning and purpose as a woman and as a wife. At least in this time in history. For Abram, who will he leave his farm too? Abram feels like a failure, as the land that has been passed down generation after generation will stop with him. Life can be so hard.

The disciples in our gospel and those in the early churches faced a lot of hardships from persecution for believing in Jesus' message. Some faced beatings, whippings, arrests, divorce, rejection, and even death. It wasn't an easy time to be a believer. Life can be so hard.

When we face these hard times having faith in God can be extremely difficult. We get angry with God or we feel disconnected, because we can't imagine God would allow us to face such overwhelming pain when over and over again God's main message to us is one of love. Our faith definitely gets challenged during these hard times.

Well in response to our suffering. In response to our doubt. God comes to us. Grabs our hand. Walks with us. Reassures us that God is connected to us. God goes on to promise to give us life. We see in our Genesis reading, God comes to Abram and promises Abram and Sarai that their offspring will be as abundant as the stars. As we read on we see that Abram and Sarai go on to have children, and then their children go on to have children, and their family keeps growing until they become a great nation. Eventually this nation becomes connected to two other great nations.

We see in our gospel that in Christ Jesus God gives us the kingdom of God. Or in other words, Jesus shows us God's love. Jesus shows us God's healing and redemption. The early believers find faith in this kingdom life. Seeing that God's love is giving them new life everyday despite the hardships they face.

We begin to hope when we begin to trust in God's promise. When we begin to see the gift of the kingdom of God that God has revealed to us through Christ Jesus. God's love touching our lives, and motivating us to love others. This is God's kingdom come for us.

We start to find the faith and the love to face the hardships in our life even when sometimes these hardships seem to get the best of us. How many times are we perplexed at how we made it through a hardship in our lives? How we were able to still be the loving people God created us to be even when these hardships seemed to be kicking our butts?

It isn't easy to follow Jesus' invitation in our gospel. To open our hearts to others. To love generously. To love God and our neighbor even when life is so hard. But with faith, we find a way to do so.

We look at our world, and how much pain there is in it right now. And we encounter so many people who are trying to face these hardships without faith. Without belief. Family. Friends. Leaders. Community members. And it breaks our hearts.

Because we know if we didn't have faith during the hard times we wouldn't be here today. Faith has pulled us through some unbelievable hardships.

In our psalm the psalmist proclaims that God is our help during our struggles. The assembly often recited this Psalm in worship to encourage each other to have hope when they faced hard times. We recite this psalm today with the same purpose.

Paul says in his letter to the Hebrews, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). And yet, we have all witnessed/seen in our lives those times where God takes our hand in the midst of our hardships and gives us a taste of the healing and redemption we are promised. Giving us hope to endure. Giving us love to continue to live with faith. We have seen God’s promises come to life for us, which helps us believe that one day again we will experience God’s healing and redemption even if we don’t see it in the moment we are facing the hardship.

Because, unfortunately, we will continue to face hardship in a world that has yet to fully experience the kingdom of God. And as our gospel states, we don’t know when Jesus will return and make everything right. So, in the meantime, Jesus has given us a taste of the kingdom of God so that we too can give people a taste of this kingdom come. To love them through the hardships as God loves us through our hardships. To give them something to hope in. To live out the kingdom of God to the best of our ability even as imperfect beings.

A kingdom where illness and suffering don’t overcome us. A kingdom where we are welcomed and loved as we are. A kingdom where we all identify as God’s children. A kingdom where loneliness is transformed into togetherness. A kingdom where broken relationships are reconciled. A kingdom where God provides for our well being. A kingdom where there is no rich or poor. A kingdom where death is no more. A kingdom where we receive life everlasting. A kingdom where God sings to us “Have a little faith in me! Have a little faith in me!”

Let us pray, loving God thank you for giving us life. Thank you for giving us hope as we face hardship. Thank you for giving us your kingdom so that we experience your love, healing, and redemption. May your gift empower us to love others. To walk with others as they face hardship. **Amen.**