

Easter 5 Mother's Day May 10 2020

First, Happy Mother's Day to all the strong and faithful women of our parish who nurture and care for us throughout the year. We gather every year to celebrate this day, but this year of course, our fellowship is online, but still I am grateful for the mothering love that the women of our congregation provide for our fellowship and. For our community, so please accept my prayers and best wishes for you this year as well. I read the results of two polls this week about the pandemic and faith. I found it very good news that in both surveys, a quarter of the respondents said that their faith had made undergoing this time of pandemic easier and also that their faith had grown deeper. Only two percent of the respondents said that their faith had decreased because of the pandemic. Digging a little deeper into the result of these polls, it turns out that women have found their faith more important now than men, by an almost two to one margin. Also, as women have been hit harder in the economic chaos created by this pandemic, it is good to see that their faith is giving them some resources to fall back on at a time when many other supports are disappearing. Finally, the other interesting result from these polls is that faith for African Americans has also increased at a much larger rate than compared to the population as a whole. Also, as one of the polls noted, the effects of the pandemic, both in terms of health and finances, has hit the African

American community much harder, but faith for Black Americans has provided a strength at a very difficult time.

Prayer: O wonderful God, open the eyes of our faith to see you and open our ears to your Word, and this we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

I found it interesting to see what a prominent and important role faith is playing for many during this pandemic and the subsequent closure of much of our economy. I know that it has been difficult in some ways to maintain our worship, to learn to navigate Zoom and to meet together online. But I am glad as well to see that what we are doing and what other congregations are doing throughout Vermont and throughout our nation and the world is helpful for the faithful at this time. But sometimes I think that even though Jesus said we can have faith to move mountains, still, especially when we see so much chaos, so much death and destruction, when we see the lives of people we love and of total strangers on the line, it seems like our faith can stretched pretty thin.

As I have mentioned to you all before, even as a priest and a preacher, I have always found my own faith to be a little bit shaky. Years ago, I was not sure what to do about that, it didn't seem like a good place to be for me in my vocation, and I felt like I was skating on some pretty thin ice. So, I took the advice of an older and wiser priest, and I prayed about it. In my prayer I decided to ask God to show me a little miracle

every day. Looking back on this, I think I might have found my inspiration in an old song by the Grateful Dead, “I Need A Miracle Every Day,” but I guess the lesson is that you have to take your inspiration wherever you find it! Anyway, for my daily dose, my little everyday miracle, it didn’t have to be anything big, I didn’t need to see the Hudson River parted like the Red Sea at the Exodus, and I didn’t need to see the hosts of heaven descending in chariots like Elisha saw. No, just a little miracle every day that would open up my eyes of faith and keep me aware and attuned to the presence of God’s love and power around me. And you know what: God did it; sometimes in the smallest of ways, like a kid who had gotten involved in a gang, extricating himself out of that life and graduating from high school; or in a person who was pretty mean spirited learning how to forgive others and to forgive herself as well. Those little miracles that make all the difference in the life of a person and renew the faith of others who see them. I was always very thankful, every day, when that little miracle was revealed and the eyes of my faith were opened so I could see it. This really did make a difference in my life, I began to see the world differently, to see, as we say in the Baptismal service, with the “gift of joy and wonder” in all God’s works.

I think it might be like this for many of us in the church, too: although we repeat the Creeds and the prayers on a regular basis, faith is still always a bit of a shaky thing for many of us. We sing the hymns about

“Rock of Ages” and “On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand,” but despite the certainty with which we might sing, truth be told, I’m not sure for myself, and maybe you are like me in this, that my heart is really there. But over the past few years, I have begun not only to accept this shaky faith I have, but I’ve come to treasure it as well.

It is difficult in these days sometimes to find that miracle to shore up a shaky faith. With all the uncertainties that surround us, with each news cycle that goes by with more and more news of the death count from the coronavirus going up, surpassing now the combined total of deaths from the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, faith that God is with us and that some sort of small miracle might take place is difficult for any one of us to find. Like the Psalmist, we want to take our refuge in God, to be delivered and for God to hear our prayers. Like the Psalmist, we ask for God to be a strong rock for us, to make God’s face shine upon us and for God’s loving kindness to save us. Sometimes these days, though, it seems that looking for a miracle, even a small one, is too much and we are lost in the midst of the uncertainties that surround us in this new time, a time in which we’ve never experienced anything like this before, in a time when nothing in the future seems to be clear for us.

But I think there is something deeper here too, which I appreciate: when I hear this Gospel story from John’s Gospel, a lesson that is often used at funeral services, I always appreciate Thomas. As I preached a few

weeks ago, when we heard the story of Thomas's doubts about the story the other disciples told him about seeing the risen Jesus, I like Thomas because he is willing to show his doubts and his uncertainties' Thomas is willing to show that his faith is just as shaky as mine, and even though he walks along side Jesus, he is just absolutely clueless about where he is. Basically, in today's lesson, Thomas's question boils down to, "Jesus, I'm lost!" And here I have to commend Thomas. Imagine that, a man actually admitting he's lost! Coming from Kentucky, I was always amused with a story about the famous pioneer Daniel Boone. Late in his life he was once asked if he'd ever been lost, and he answered, "Well, no I wasn't ever lost, but I was pretty seriously bewildered for about a week." But dear Thomas, God bless him, actually has the courage to say to Jesus, "I'm lost." And Jesus answer is simple and to the point; he tells Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth and the life." This is an answer that seems to me to be one of those little miracles I always needed to see. Jesus doesn't have to make the heavens open wide or a glorious ray of light to shine down from the heavens, no, he just tells Thomas that what he needs, the direction for his life is right there in front of him: just follow Jesus. It's like the story also from John's Gospel of Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor. When Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" Jesus doesn't answer because he doesn't have to; he is the truth and he's standing right there in front of Pilate, but Pilate can't see it. Well, Thomas, thank God, does see it, he

follows Jesus, and he puts that shaky faith into action: he lets Jesus open the eyes of his faith enough to see that Jesus is the way, and to follow him, to live his life according to Jesus' teaching, to reach out in love and forgiveness of others, to care for the least of these and to do the works of peace and justice. Jesus gives Thomas this simple direction and Thomas, despite his shaky faith, despite his doubts and uncertainties, Thomas is able to see with the eyes of faith.

And that, my sisters and brothers, as the writer Ann Lamott says, is enough miracle for us to live in. To see in Jesus the way; to see in Jesus' love for us the way to live and follow Jesus with our eyes set on his example and our ears opened to his call. No matter if you are blessed with a strong faith, or if you are like I am and find your faith to be rather thin and shaky, it is miracle enough for us to live in, seeing Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and following as faithfully as we dare in his way. Because in doing so we put even our shaky faith into action, we open our eyes in awareness of the love of God given so freely to us and we are opened to share that love with a world so desperately in need. Today, Jesus, as the way and the truth and the life shares a little miracle with us as well, with you and with me and invites us to see and hear and follow. In these difficult and uncertain times, in this topsy-turvy world we live in these days, Jesus bids us, "Do not let your hearts, be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." On this mother's Day, we can continue to give

God thanks for the love of the strong and faithful women in our midst, those who lead our parish and those who serve our community. And so, this morning, we move forward in faith, moving, yes, into an uncertain future, but following Jesus on the Way of truth and Life, following Jesus in faith, steadfastly following, as we will pray, in Jesus's steps in the way that leads to eternal life. Thanks be to God this morning for the blessings of Mother's Day and for Jesus leading us into the Way, the Truth and the life. Amen.