

Pentecost 4 June 16, 2024 “Father’s Day”

There’s a song titled, “I Need a Miracle Everyday,” and I especially like the Grateful Dead’s version of it, and I think that I have mentioned this in a sermon before; nevertheless, I found myself humming it earlier this week because of a couple of different experiences I had. First, I visited with Rick Fiddock the day after his neurosurgery, and I witnessed a small miracle that less than a day after he had regained full almost full movement in his hand. Shortly afterward, his surgeon stopped by on his rounds and let Rick know that the tumor was benign, which was a great relief. It really felt like a miracle. Then, the next morning, I was at Hope Cemetery for the graveside service for Ana Cumming, one of our senior members from Good Shepherd who died last November at age 97. The gravesite was lovely, one of Barre’s finest memorial in my opinion, but the day was overcast, threatening rain. We began the service in the gloom, but soon there were patches of blue between the clouds. At the end of the service I turned toward the memorial to pronounce the final blessing, as just as I raised my arm, the sun burst out in a full brilliance, almost blindingly bright. Again, a little miracle it seemed, so fitting for Ana who brought light to her family and friends, and indeed to this church, for decades. So to lay her to rest in a blaze of light, even on a gloomy morning, seemed pretty miraculous. As I related these stories to Joe Mueller, he also remembered a little miracle he’d seen recently too. All this reminded me of a time years ago when it just seemed that nothing was quite right in my life and in our world, and I remember praying, perhaps influenced by that Grateful Dead tune, praying for God to show me a little miracle every day, just to keep my faith intact to keep on. It didn’t have to be a big miracle, not parting the Red Sea or walking across the waters, just something to restore and renew my faith. And that’s just what God did, and is still doing even today, even when I’m not so aware of it!

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, this day we hear your word about our faith, how it may transform our lives; may this faith become ever deeper and stronger as we follow where you call us. This we ask in the name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

As we enter into this Season after Pentecost, this time for growth in our faith after celebrating at the empty tomb, we are now in a time to

reflect on the nature of our faith and how the life we live in that faith, our course and direction as we follow Jesus now in our own day, how this continues to feed and inspire us. This is also, and not just an empty coincidence, this is also a time for growth in the world around us: the hills and woods are brimming with growth, wildflowers abound, our gardens are blooming and even the carefully tended veggies are showing surprising growth (I saw the first tomatoes on our vines yesterday!); so growth is all around us, our eyes and senses are attuned to seeing this tremendous transformation surrounding us. And now, of course, in this Season after Pentecost, in this Season of the Spirit, this growth is part of our own consciousness as well. We hear Jesus' teaching to his friends and followers on the Kingdom of God and the nature of their faith and how that faith informs their lives. This morning, these lessons of Jesus fall into that 'little, every day' sort of category: the first example we hear is rather pedestrian and everyday: seed that has been scattered begins to grow...the small, tender shoots, growing into full plants, maturing and finally after a time ready for harvest. The second parable is just as mundane, but perhaps even more memorable, the parable of the mustard seed, that smallest of seeds which grows into an enormous bush, giving shelter and shade for the birds. Here Jesus points to a great contrast: something so small and seemingly insignificant yet that has such a great effect, certainly both unexpected and unlooked for. Jesus employs both of these examples to show his friends and followers, to show you and me today, the power of faith. Faith which can seem so insignificant and small, faith which seems to make so little difference in our lives and our world can actually carry a great weight: this faith can change things, transform things in a deeper way than we may be aware. This faith, Jesus shows us, can make all the difference in our lives and in the life of our world.

The lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures, despite its length, makes this short and sweet claim as well. As Samuel finds out in his search for a new king to rule in Israel, "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." This is our call today as well: to seek the depth in our lives and in our world, to seek what is really important for our souls and for all of God's creation. Now I know this sounds a lot like the old saying, You can't judge a book

by its cover,” but it goes deeper than that: this changes not only how we perceive the world and ourselves, our faith actually changes us, it moves us beyond ourselves, toward a horizon, toward that place where God beckons us to be. As Paul puts this, “we walk by faith and not by sight,” taking part on that journey that the call of God, that faith initiates in our lives. And this is deep, deep because it moves us out into the world in a new way. Again, as Paul says, it is this faith in Christ, that brings about, “a new creation, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” It is this faith that opens up a new orientation for us, that makes us part of this new creation in the continuing creative Spirit of God’s love transforming our world by holding out the possibility for deeper and deeper harmony in all creation.

I know, I know all too well, that this faith, sometimes as small and fragile it might seem in our lives is more aspirational than real. It too often seems that we can’t rustle up the necessary faith to keep our lives on course. But thankfully, mercifully, it does not all depend on us; it does not depend only on our frail efforts. God has both given us this gift of faith through Jesus and continually guides us in this way of faith, in Jesus’ Way of Love. We seek God’s help in this way of faith. We began our worship today with a prayer to guide us on this course, a prayer, “Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love,” that embedded in this community of faith, our faith will be strengthened and deepened, that our lives will be enriched as we seek to live in this way. And it is in this faith, guided by God’s grace and love, nourished at this Altar in the presence of the Risen Christ, that we can proclaim God’s truth with boldness and minister God’s justice with compassion. Yes, this gift of faith, perhaps as small as a mustard seed, is the gift of love we share with the world as our lives are transformed and our souls are nourished by this Spirit of Love. In the days to come, as we live deeper into this faith, may God always be present with us, giving us the power to do that which accords with God’s loving purpose for our world, to share God’s love, showing others the awesome power and amazing grace of God’s love that their lives too might be made whole. Thanks be to God for this great grace and thanks be to Christ for this loving gift of faith. Amen.