

Sunday, February 24, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “Wait for God”

Have you ever made a life plan...you know looking ahead a few years and picturing how things will be?

Has your life ever followed your plans?

I mean followed them exactly?

Of course not.

One of the lessons that we learn early in our lives is that things do not always go according to plan.

Sometimes that is because circumstances change, sometimes it is because we change, sometimes it seems as if God has other plans for us.

Knowing, however, that things might not turn out as we expect does not keep us from hoping, from dreaming, from moving forward.

The psalmist tells us however, to wait for God – not to take things into our own hands.

Our readings today give us two examples of lives upset by circumstances, but seemingly guided by God.

Abraham and Sara had been listening to the Lord’s instructions for years.

They had moved several times and now were finally settled, with land, livestock, servants – everything except children.

It is probably safe to say that they were content with their life.

But now at an advanced age, God promises to provide offspring and descendants as numerous as the stars.

Abraham and Sara trust, as they have always trusted, that God is watching over them, offering protection and care.

Abraham’s interaction with God demonstrates for us that the covenant stands. Walter Bruggemeian tells us,

“The future of God’s goodness is open to those who trust in that future, neither holding on to the present nor conjuring an alternative future of their own.

“Faith”, says Bruggeman, “is reliance on God’s promise of overcoming the present for a new life.”

This is what Lent is all about – new life, transformation.

While the Old Testament reading showed us the assurance of God’s mercy and protection the Gospel reading this week shows the persecution Jesus faced as he faithfully followed God’s call.

A striking feature of this reading is Jesus’ refusal to be daunted by the threats against his life, and his determination to continue his mission in spite of the suffering he will face.

Jesus knows what will lie ahead; his lament is that it didn’t have to be this way.

If only the people of Jerusalem had heard his message and taken it to heart, things would be different.

If only his demonstration of peace and gentleness had served as a model for behavior – this immanent death could have been avoided.

I find this passage to be one of the clearest illustrations of Jesus vulnerability.

He is irritated with Herod, calling him a ‘fox,’ and he is saddened by Jerusalem ignoring him.

I feel compassion for Jesus when I read this account.

I want to reach out to him and assure him that we understand the message now.

But do we?

Do our lives today reflect the teachings of the prophet, Jesus Christ?

Do we love one another as Jesus loved us? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves?

Do we wait for God or do we try to control things ourselves?

How vulnerable do you feel on any given day?

Today’s scripture provides us with the assurance of a close, protective relationship with God but we are also reminded that the call to live out God’s mission does not mean a life free of pain and struggle.

“The protection we find in God is not a guarantee that no harm will come to us, but a promise that, whatever we may face, we are ultimately destined for glory, and God’s strength will sustain us and keep us faithful to the end.” (vandlar)

Our vulnerability, as well as God’s love are both internal issues.

They are defined and refined within our own hearts and minds.

Much of what makes us feel insecure in life is generated by our own sense of inadequacy.

Our disappointments are most often driven by our own unspoken expectations of how life should be.

In a world of expediency the call to embrace the tough and challenging path of the Gospel can seem out of place

However, if we will trust the call and embrace it, we will discover a source of life that endures through the worst times and empowers us in the best times.

When we can view our relationship with God as a source of strength that enables us to endure the toughest challenges, struggles and conflicts, we will find it to be sufficient.

If we are able to remain hopeful and committed to transformation, even as we recognize the evil systems and structures that oppose us (as Jesus did) we will be able to face the struggles in our world wisely, optimistically, and creatively.

The truth is that a relationship with God, is a “protection” of sorts from the woes of the world.

When we follow Christ, we learn ways to live well – we learn to love others and ourselves, which inevitably creates deeper and more stable relationships;

we learn to devote ourselves to God and God’s purposes, which offer us meaning and fulfillment;

we learn to refuse to play the games of greed, revenge and abuse of power, which controls our appetites and keeps us from self-destruction;

we learn spiritual disciplines which increase our self-care and health.

We gather as a community of faith, young and old, to learn these things together.

We gather because the best-laid plans rarely come to fruition and we need each other’s help on this journey.

Today, you may need help, but tomorrow, your neighbor will need you.

There is a second important truth that we must remember – people who follow Christ are not “better” than others.

God’s “blessing” is not a reward for goodness, just as suffering and difficulty are not God’s judgment or curse for sinfulness.

If we believe our faith and our determination to do "what’s right" in God’s eyes is a guarantee of safety, we will be sorely disappointed.

The Gospel offers us doorways to life, while ensuring that we know that God has no favorites, and that our call is to invite all others to find life in Christ with us.

Henri Nouwen said,

“To be able to enjoy fully the many good things the world has to offer, we must be detached from them. To be detached does not mean to be indifferent or uninterested. It means to be nonpossessive. Life is a gift to be grateful for and not a property to cling to.

A nonpossessive life is a free life. But such freedom is only possible when we have a deep sense of belonging. To whom then do we belong? We belong to God, and the God to whom we belong has sent us into the world to proclaim in his Name that all of creation is created in and by love and calls us to gratitude and joy.”

By demonstrating that our worst enemies are inside us, Jesus is demonstrating that vulnerability is our strength.

In our vulnerability we are able to accept our complete dependence on God.

We are able to recognize and understand that our life plans have little value, if they are based on us having complete control over what happens.

Our powerlessness is our strength.

It is in completely surrendering ourselves to God that we become strong enough to live fully, whatever comes our way.

As beloved children of God, created in God’s image and dedicated to following the teachings of Jesus Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out this combined blessing of vulnerability and relentless love each and every day.

When we let go of worrying about the past – which we cannot change, and surrender control of the future to the only one who knows, we are then free to live this day to its fullest.

When you wake up in the morning, rather than reviewing everything that you must accomplish in the day ahead, try instead to ask God,

What will you bring me today? How shall I serve you this day?

The psalmist tells us that while we wait for God we should be strong and let our hearts take courage.

Let’s try this. Let’s surrender just a bit of our planning and control and wait for God.

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, we put our trust in you. We know that your love is strong and covers all aspects of our lives. We know that our power is so much greater than our own. Grant us the grace, to let go, just a bit, to let you into our lives. We open our hearts and souls to your spirit and await your call. O God, our lives are busy and full of decisions and plans. Help us to relax and trust in your care. Help us to be strong and to have courage to pursue our paths, even when the odds seem against us or others warn us that it is not the way to go. Let us have the faith of Abraham and the courage of Jesus in our day to day lives.

Hear us this morning as we pray for those whom we love. We pray for

Dick, Theresa, Don, Gloria, Bill, Kit, Robert, Claude, Becky, Laura, Tobie, Mark, Greta, Jane, Peter, Michelle, Warren

May your healing touch be upon each one.

We pray for those who grieve, that their pain might be lessened by our love.

We pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who live in poverty of body, mind or spirit – May they know the wonder of your presence in their lives.

We turn to you in the sacred silence of this Meetinghouse and ask that you hear the prayers of our hearts...

Jesus taught them to pray in these words....