

Lament, Faith, Relationship

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between October 2 and October 8 Inclusive

October 3, 2010, 19th Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 17:5-10](#), The Message; or [Luke 17:5-10](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart](#), [Luke 17:5-10](#).

Click here: [Suzanne E. Syke's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

Note: This sermon was preached October 3, 2004, at Plevna-Ompah Pastoral Charge by the Rev. Suzanne E. Sykes.

Lamentations 3: 19-26

Lamentations 1: 1-6

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17: 5-10

Our texts this morning move from lament, to faith to relationship. We begin with the lament of the prophets over the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, that beautiful city, stands as a metaphor for the people of Israel. The prophets, the religious people, and the few survivors left in the city mourn their dead and the deported.

What had gone wrong? they ask. What could we have done that was so terrible that God punishes us this way? For in ancient Israel not being saved from enemies meant that the nation itself was not in shalom - peace, harmony with its God.

Like them we ask those questions too. This time of year - the days following the anniversary of 9/11 and the ongoing death and destruction in Iraq, the Sudan, a season of destruction caused by one hurricane after another, the illness and death of children which leaves the old to mourn the young. All these things cause us to reflect on our situation, they prompt us to ask with the writer of lamentations: "What has gone wrong? What have I done to deserve this?"

The power of lament is to reflect on our situation of how we are not saved. Saved is a word that in our texts as well as in the ancient world meant to be whole. And to be whole meant to be in harmony with God's desires. In an act of lament we reflect on how we are not in harmony with each other, with the land, with God. Our Jewish neighbours have a day set aside each year for lament - for reflection and self-examination - Yom Kippur - the day of atonement which they celebrated last week. Lament is an opportunity to reflect on the nature of our faith.

This is what the author of our epistle does with Timothy. Reflect on the faith that was given to you, that you were raised in and instructed in. Think of the faith of your mother and grandmother for this is your inheritance. Finally the author reminds him that Paul himself put his hands on him - a gesture that goes back to ancient times that confers the power from one person to another - in that act Paul shares his faith with Timothy.

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

This is your inheritance, he reminds him. Now make it your own. That is the challenge we face when we find ourselves caught up in the forces of lament and all its questions. Those are the questions that tell us what we have inherited. Those are the questions that give us clues to where our struggle lies to make our faith our own.

And that brings us to the Gospel - faith the size of mustard seed. Faith that small is big enough to move mulberry trees - or as it appears in other places - mountains. But what does it mean? Why a mustard seed?

The mustard seed appears several times in the gospels so we know it was an important symbol for the gospel writers and the early church communities. It is the central image in one of Jesus most popular parables - the parable of the mustard seed, where the tiny seed grows up to be a huge tree providing food and places to nest for birds and other creatures.

Did they have some kind of mustard in the Middle East that was vastly different than ours? No. Like here it is a weed. It grew as scrubby plants in fields just as it does here and it was unwanted. There is no way it could support a birds nest. That is the clue to why Jesus uses it - it was unwanted. No one would keep it or treasure it. The parable is a joke - in the kingdom everything will be different. The kingdom does not run by our everyday rules or values.

In our saying this morning, all those images of the mustard seed parable are present in the background. So something as unwanted, and unvalued as a mustard seed is the image for our faith. And it is important to keep the parable in mind as we think about this saying. Because the parable reminds us that it is a metaphor and not to be taken literally. I think we get ourselves into trouble when we think literally - when we get caught up in size for one thing. I think the parable tells us that size doesn't matter. It tells us that conventional wisdom doesn't matter either.

There is always a temptation with this saying in Luke, I think, to read it literally; in the sense that if I really had a true faith then I could change the course of events - trees or mountains really would throw themselves into the sea at my command. I don't think this is what the story hopes for us. Think again of the purpose of lament: a time to reflect on how we are not whole, not in harmony with God's desires for the universe and for us. It asks us to make the faith we inherited our own. To do that we need to examine that faith and ask questions of it. Faith that is our own is being in relationship with God's aim for the world in this instant of reality. It doesn't take much faith, much in tune with God's desires, a very tiny bit in fact, and overlooked, the size of a mustard seed will do - to make a huge difference in how God can work in the world.

From lament to the faith of our ancestors to relationship discerning the lure of God in our lives. It is a continuous process in our lives, the rhythm of our faith. That is what we commemorate today as we join with thousands around the world celebrating the process that marks our lives as religious as we share communion with each other.

George Hermanson for Suzanne Sykes

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