

Pentecost 6 June 30, 2024 proper 8

The opening prayer that we prayed just a few minutes ago is a particularly good prayer for the time after General Convention of the Episcopal Church! Elizabeth and I attended the convention this year for the first time, and it was really amazing. The General convention takes place every three years to develop the policies of the Church in our life together and in serving the world in the Name of the Risen Christ. I have to admit that in a way it is a bit maddening: we spent about 5 hours during the first two days deciding the process for hearing resolutions. On the one hand, it could be seen as seen as a colossal waste of time, but it was important to decide how this could be a democratic and representative gathering, making sure all had an opportunity to have they say, yet at the same time making sure the process could move along. This has been the Episcopal Church's practice for 240 years in the House of Deputies, for a representative democracy to order our life together. The other special thing about this convention was that a new Presiding Bishop was elected for a nine year term. We elected Bishop Sean Rowe of Northwest Pennsylvania, and at the age of 49, he is the youngest Presiding Bishop ever elected. He has many good ideas for leading the church in the next few years and was a speaker at our Vermont convention a few years ago. He also has a working class background, his father, grandfather and uncles were all steelworkers in Pennsylvania. And this is why I found the opening prayer so significant for this day: we acknowledged in this prayer that God has founded the Church on the apostles and prophets, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone, and that we are bound together in a unity of spirit. And that is precisely why we gathered together in Louisville, from all over the United States, from Haiti, from Puerto Rice, several South and Central American nations, and the Episcopal Churches in Europe, gathering together to discuss and plan our future together, to worship and pray together and to seek the ways in which our faith and witness may be strengthened. It was truly impressive, just as the words of our opening prayer this morning suggest and I was thankful to be a part of it, and grateful for your support and prayers during this past week. Thank you!

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, as we hear your word today, may our faith be strengthened and may we be inspired to share this faith with others. This we ask in the name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

During this season in our church life together, we are often called in our readings and prayers to reflect on the nature of faith. I have preached about this in the last few sermons, you may even recall me quoting the Grateful Dead, "I need a miracle everyday!" I think that faith Jesus brings

to us, the faith Jesus calls us to live in and the faith that gives a shape and direction to our lives is so important. The examples this morning from Mark's gospel are fairly straightforward in this regard: two stories, one overlaying another, of faith being a powerful and life-changing force in our lives: Jairus' daughter is at the point of death and Jesus is called to come and heal her. Along the way, a woman reaches out to touch his robe and is healed and Jesus confronts her, and in fear and trembling she confesses what she has done, and Jesus proclaims her faith has healed her. Meanwhile, even though it appears that Jairus' daughter has died, Jesus brings her back to life, and in a little detail I always love, Jesus tells them to get her something to eat! Like I said, two straightforward examples of faith leading to healing and life. What could be more clear?

Well, of course, as we all know, life certainly does not work out this way in many cases: in a world at war, from Sudan, to Ukraine and most tragically raging in the Holy Land, the deep distress of great violence, thousands dying day after day, civilian deaths and injuries of unimaginable numbers and scenes of destruction beyond imagination. Also, as we face the destruction of the very planet we inhabit, a climate crisis that continues to loom larger with each passing day. Then there are other tragic situations closer to home, such as a housing crisis forcing greater numbers into homelessness and an addiction crisis taking the lives of thousands of our neighbors each day as well. As heart-breaking as the news can be these days, as much as the lament of Psalm 130, "Out of the depths I cry to thee; O Lord hear my voice!" seems to be not only an ancient refrain, but words that anyone of us could have uttered over these past few weeks. But such a cry of lament should not cause us to bury our heads in the sand: no; just like the Psalmist, a cry of lament that is genuine, that cuts us to the heart and that shakes our souls, this sort of a cry of lament forces us to look deeper, to regard deep within ourselves for the source of the pain we feel and for the manner in which that pain can be confronted in our lives and in the world. Indeed, that's exactly what the psalmist does: the psalmist sees that with God is forgiveness, that patience is called for and that God gives us hope. The psalmist sees that in our patience, not rushing God to conjure up some sort of magic trick, to snap the divine fingers and make everything alright, but rather to find the redemptive promise of God and to stake our faith there, in that promise of redemption. "My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchers for the morning, more than watchers for the morning, for with God there is plenteous redemption." This is a basis for faith, knowing at a deep level that God is with us in the world, even when that seems not to be the case. It is that

“hope against hope,” that finds a place deep in our souls, giving us life even in the most difficult situations we face.

Of course, that ancient cry of lament and seeking hope and redemption have a ring of truth and urgency in our day. As we look around us and see the deep social ills we face, as the sense of unease that begins to pervade our souls because the evils of poverty, the opioid crisis, and violence seem to be on the rise while there is a partisan gridlock among our representatives and the elected officials who are charged with seeking our common welfare so that nothing stands to keep these evils at bay. But we have gathered here this morning because at a deep level in our souls we both seek an answer to these pervasive evils and we know that there is something for us in which our hope can be grounded. Like that ancient psalmist in the cry of lament, each of us seeks the peace of God which will reside with us and which will fill our world. The wisdom of our ancestors, a wisdom so difficult to find in our fast paced world of instant gratification is that we must wait; that we must have patience. We come here this morning knowing at a deep level that yes, this is the case, that God is with us even in those darkest hours, even in the times which seem to be the most bleak. Yet, still the sense surrounds us that the times are dire and that we seem to be moving backwards, seem to be moving further away from a place in our lives where God’s goodness and mercy are close at hand. But we return here, here into this sanctuary, here gathered with other Christian friends, return here to seek once more God in our midst, God with us, that even with the lament on our lips, there is a spark of faith in our hearts to continue to inspire us in our faith. Once again we return here to surround. This Altar in prayer, to seek the word of God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness given freely to us, to you and to me in the midst of weakness, we come to this table in fellowship once more to have the eyes of faith enlightened, to look to the horizon of God’s tender care. That vision we prayed for at the beginning of our worship, to be a Holy Temple acceptable to God, this vision is given by God as we come together, gathering round this Altar in prayer and in the presence of Christ, that our eyes may be opened to God’s never-failing grace we can share with others and be strengthened in our acts of kindness and reconciliation. Thanks be to God for this amazing Grace we share and thanks be to Christ for setting us on this way of Love. Amen.