



The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 9th, 2020

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Sermon Transcript

Peter's Loss of Trust

Wondrous God, author of language and light, guide me to use words as you have, to cast light into dark waters and draw out justice and truth. May these words echo your love for all whom you have created. Amen.

Today's Gospel from Matthew, is so very appropriate for the times we are living in. In this reading, Peter almost but not quite gives us permission to lose faith, temporarily of course, just for the briefest of moments only. His momentary loss of faith that Christ would be there for him enabling Peter to walk on water goes hand in hand with our "where is God" moments which occur all too frequently at this time. There has been much to be concerned and cautious about for the past five months and there will be for the foreseeable future. Our unease does not merely extend to the pandemic of Covid-19, nor can it be laid totally at the feet of the many violent protests taking place around the world especially the deadly protests that are rocking the U.S.A.

China and India but we also feel and fear the hardships that the current economic conditions placed on us and on our neighbours. It's easy to see this time in history as a time when loss of faith, whether a fleeting moment or days of relentless depression can put us in a deep pit of despair. We've been blindsided by this pandemic, by what is happening across the world as the loss of lives continues to grow and the marches for justice are anything but peaceful. We could, as Peter

did, lose our footing and begin in panic to fall. Like Peter we desire to know that our God, our Divine Source of all will reach out and pull us close. Be assured that it will be so.

Haven't we had endured a panic-struck moment as Peter had. Those ugly and confusing, sad and challenging times that come unbidden! Yet those moments when we are afraid, searching for a safety net or a resolution to an issue in our lives, or a miracle cure for an ailment or a mending of broken relationships, those moments are real and frightening. Our lives are not lived without experiencing challenges; life is not lived with every situation being predictable or immediately solvable. We are gifted tools of discernment and wisdom to think these times through and faith to reach out to, to steady us, to uplift us until the time of trial passes. Those same lifesaving hands that held Peter up are here within reach of our cries of "Lord save me."

Let's think for a moment just where it is that Peter asks to go and the circumstances surrounding the disciples. He and his companions have battled the Sea of Galilee throughout the night in a boat that likely would have been just over 8 meters long and 2 meters wide. The sea is not a huge body of water, it's called a sea simply because of tradition. It's just 13 km across when travelling east-west and 53 km long with a depth of 43m. My blessing was to have sailed across this body of water in the company of Lynne Dole and Jane Hall. Jane is a sister to Lynn Thackwray. We enjoyed a calm crossing and I am grateful for the smoothness of that trip and for my travelling companions on this our pilgrimage to the Holy Land. That's a talk for another day. It is easy to imagine how the waves could be such as to batter about a small fishing boat as the disciples would have been rowing; it's even easier to imagine the terror felt by those on this small vessel. When Peter steps out of the boat he enters turmoil. His motive isn't to escape from threat of the boat capsizing, for he goes into a situation where the threats now look different, into a place where Jesus is defying and reordering the assumed boundaries. There is any number of reasons we can attribute to Peter for leaving the boat, could have been a bit of spontaneity playing out, though I don't know of anyone who would exhibit that kind of spur of the moment act, could have been Peter testing Jesus to prove who he truly was, perhaps Peter simply wanted to walk where Jesus walked.

Peter in his crying out of “Lord save me” offers two resolutions to our query, first if this was a test Jesus passed it but equally as important we learn that Peter had a faith deeply rooted in his believe of Jesus as Lord, as the Christ.

We have but a glimpse of the faith Peter already had established but had not yet come to understand fully that he possessed so strong and solid belief.

It’s the nature of faith to waver from time to time when we have stepped into the unknown, ventured into unusual circumstances and that’s where we find Peter at. There is a saying that goes as thus “that which is broken is made stronger.” A momentary loss of faith when chaos gets the upper hand can be mended in such a way that our faith journey is reinforced, is iron strong, becomes rock solid as we make our way forward in life. Not because we have been tested by our Creator but due more to the fact that we have put ourselves to testing and are then accepting the outcomes whatever they may be. Each outcome or resolution creating characterises of who we each are. Peter’s life takes many turns; he denies Jesus three times after boldly declaring he would never deny Jesus and wept bitterly after what Jesus had told him came to pass. This same Peter after Jesus’ ascension and the baptism of the Holy Spirit stood before thousands and ministered the gospel so persuasively and powerfully that 3,000 souls were saved. Peter known as the Rock was the one whom Jesus depended on to be a builder of churches. Peter became all that he was created to be and that’s what God asks of each of us, to be fully alive in the world, that we might sing God’s praises and care for Creation. Sure Peter made many mistakes along the way, he failed and his weaknesses are recorded throughout the gospels for us to draw heart from for we also often fail.

As Peter matured he remained steadfast in faith and strong, continuously preaching the word of life even though thrown into prison. Peter let go of his fear, and what was once was broken in him was made stronger in the learning of trust. Richard Wagamese in his book “One Story, One Song’ writes that the direction of south represents trust. And so I quote from his writing “Trust is the spiritual by-product of innocence. My people (Ojibwa) say that innocence is more than lack of knowledge and experience; it’s learning to look at the world with wonder. When we do that, we live in a learning way. (and he continues)

Trust, the ability to open yourself to teachings, is the gateway for each of us to becoming who we were created to be. All things bear teachings. Teachings are hidden in every leaf and rock. But only when we look at the world with wonder do the teachings reveal themselves and trust is also the ability to put those teachings to work in our lives. Trust, is in fact, our first act of faith and our first step towards the principle and courage that will guide us.” End of quote

We are to trust not as the foolish trust. Trust as our first act of faith, trust in our Creator and Creating God as a babe in arms trusts its parents. Trust in any relationship is the foundation for success and that’s never more true than our relationship with our Creator.

Today more than at any other time in currently history trust is greatly needed. Trust that by following paths laid out by medical professionals we shall move forward towards a health of body, not only for ourselves but all across the globe. Trust in our faithful God to continue to guide us to a healthy spiritual body that we in turn might be a blessing to all we meet.

I pray we each are able to overcome our fears and reach out to the one who brings us peace, who upholds us when it appears as though our world is tumbling down around us, who says ‘come to me all who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest.’ When we are anxious we have simply to open up allowing and trusting the Holy Spirit to calm us so God’s joy, comfort, peace and strength can take over. When we slip we shall be lifted, when we break we shall be made stronger, and in being stronger we shall be at the place of total peace, at our own place of shalom. I pray it may be so. Amen.