

Rector's Sermon: 10 May 2020

Doesn't it all feel so up in the air?

I cannot think of another time when so many people have felt so uncertain, had so many unanswered and unanswerable questions all at the same time. So many plans have been upended or suspended. I seem to be spending so much time cancelling things – holidays, theatre, concerts. So many guidelines have suddenly become provisional, temporary and subject to constant revision. How long can this last? When will we get to go out, to gather, to travel, work normally, work at all, to hug, feel secure again? This unseen virus, with its terrible tentacles that have reached into our homes, churches, schools, hospitals, economy has left us feeling unmoored, untethered, adrift, even more than we often do as humans. We may be feeling in a state of suspension, unable to get a foothold on something solid and dependable, concrete and unshakeable. It's all up in the air.

And it is into this very context that we receive our Gospel passage this morning. Yes, the feeling of uncertainty is real; the feeling of being off course without our regular patterns and ways of doing things. The yearning desire for something unmovable yet lifegiving, solid yet sustaining, concrete yet creative is real. And so how wonderful it is that today God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like sinking sand, a truth that is sure when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all is shifting. God gives us precisely what we need for this moment and for every moment because God gives us a person and makes us into a people. Today's Gospel bears witness to this assurance, this foothold, this pledge of security, no matter what. In fact, Martin Luther called today's Gospel, "the best and most comforting sermon that the Lord Christ delivered on earth, a treasure and a jewel not to be purchased with the world's goods."

Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." With Jesus, our footing is sure, we have a way forward. We may not see the next step, but Jesus does, and if we stay close, follow him, and depend on him, we can move forward undergirded by the unmovable, unshakeable, unshifting sands that supports us, the guide that won't leave us, the God that never ever would abandon us.

Jesus assures us that if we know him, we know the one he calls Father, also. Thus, God becomes knowable because Jesus is knowable and the God we know in Jesus Christ entered into humanity and dwelt among us, making his home among the poor, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, blessing children, washing feet, weeping at the death of his friend. He promised that death will not be victorious, met his disciples even when they had isolated themselves in an upper room (that suddenly feels horrible current!), went ahead to prepare a place for us, and will come and take us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. God is with us, in our vulnerability, our uncertainty and fear.

Jesus reminds the disciples, and therefore us, that none of us makes our own way to God. We aren't earning a way to God by the way we practice our faith. We aren't succeeding in something that

people of other faiths are failing at. That's not the point Jesus is making here. The point is that though we get distracted, Jesus stays focused. Though we stumble, Jesus holds onto us.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." Keep going. The footing is sure. The path is solid. We cannot get lost. God won't let us go. Jesus offers assurance that following him is the way to know God, the way to an abundant life, the way to peace and joy, no matter our circumstances. Jesus is the way. Stay on the path and keep going. God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like sinking sand, a truth that is sure when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all is shifting because God gives us a person, Jesus, to be the Way for us.

But God doesn't stop there. Yes, God gives us a person and then, through that very person, makes us into a people, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a dwelling place for God, a place from which and in which God works and is worshipped, made of living stones.

This spiritual house, that we are creating every time we gather for worship, is both solid and dynamic. It's tougher than concrete, yet life-giving. It's more lasting than granite, yet nimble. It's stronger than marble, yet supple, and more magnificent than anything that can be carved by the most talented human artist, because this temple is made of living stones - us, people of God, called and loved and gathered, and built up together by God, even when we are physically apart as we are at present - it really is a thing of wonder.

In making us into a building God sustains through all time and space, spanning and including all generations of the faithful, God is not granting surety at the price of stagnation. We are not just holding it all together by staying still, encasing it in concrete. No. This temple of living stones, built on Christ the sure foundation, is dependable, subtle and yet creative, just like the God in whose image we are all fearfully and wonderfully made.

So, remember, during this time of pandemic, where the constant stream of news can fill us with despair and deep anxiety, the constancy of Jesus' immeasurable love and care for us never wavers; it is not provisional, temporary or unknowable. It cannot be canceled and doesn't ever need to be rescheduled.

'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life' is the unshakeable, firm foundation on which we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple made of living stones. Amen.

Tim