

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

17 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“5 Minutes”

Israelite people speak of the Wilderness and the ‘Wilderness Years’ as a time when God was testing them and forging them into a nation and a people. The Bible says that the people of Israel spent 40 years in the desert, but really it was probably much longer than that.

The desert taught the people many things. It taught them about their dependence on God and on each other. It showed them the value of water and food and how possessions are useless when the number one criteria is survival.

More than any other event, Israel’s time in the Wilderness of Sinai influenced her people and for hundreds of years.

There was no other time when Israel seemed as close to her God. Prophets and religious writers would harp back to this time as being special in the relation between Yahweh and his chosen people.

This pattern of being chosen, then falling from grace; spending time in the Wilderness or desert, before returning to fulfill a mission, is common in the Old Testament. It happens to Jacob and later to Joseph and then of course Moses himself. Later David and several of the Prophets would have the same experience. In each of their stories the desert represents a kind of death that leads to a new life and a new beginning.

Jesus too goes out into the wilderness on the far side of the Jordan before his ministry begins. It is there in solitude and isolation that he prays to his Father and prepares for his mission to bring the "Kingdom of God, to his people.”

As we draw near to the end of another “Church Calendar Year”, we too should go to a quiet place where we also can reflect on our lives and plan for what is to come. It is in those quiet moments that we truly come face to face with God and perhaps hear more clearly what he is asking of us.

There is a sense that when we do, this Jesus comes and speaks to us in a new way. I don’t mean by that his message is any different, what I mean is that we meet a different Jesus. Here is the heart of our faith and our individual calling as Christians that sometime in our year each of us must venture out into the wilderness with Jesus. There we have to sit down with him and find out what he is about and what he is asking of us. You might imagine that is a scary proposition, something akin to sitting down with Dr. Phil in front of a live TV audience, while he psycho-analysis your marriage and your personality.

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Our fear arises, of course, from our own self knowledge. No one knows us better than ourselves. That self knowledge tells us that we are a worm, a tangled web of distortion, full of pride, self importance and the propensity for putting our self first. How can we expect to dialogue with the “Son of God”, the “Messiah”, the “Savior of the world?”

The answer rests in the fact that Jesus knows as much about each of us as we do about ourselves. And it really does not matter. For there is a Jesus who speaks to each one of us as brother or sister, who is far from being judgmental. He is the Jesus who speaks to us from the heart of failure.

It is sometimes difficult for us to grasp this, because of the way that Christ towers over the world’s history. Jesus as Messiah and teacher fails in his mission to convince Israel that the time has come for a new approach and a new way. His Kingdom of love and forgiveness is rejected. He dies the death of a criminal upon a shameful cross.

Jesus only ultimately succeeds, with the notion that he can plant in our hearts the smallest seed that speaks of his love and the true nature of God. We are, you and I, carriers. We are carriers of “the Jesus virus.” We are carriers of some sort of love bug. We are carriers, imperfect, distorted, as we are, we are carriers of God’s teaching and his Son’s word. Whether you like it or not, once you say: “Yes” to Jesus in Baptism you become a surrogate womb for the Kingdom of God.

In that lies the secret why the Son of God will sit down with each of us in the quiet wilderness of our life and call us “brother or sister.” In plain truth Jesus needs us. He needs us for his Kingdom to succeed. He needs us that his death has meaning. He needs us that all he came to save may be touched, touched by our imperfect hands in his name.

The Jesus we sit down with takes our hand in his. We may be the ‘little ones’ of today’s Gospel, but together we make up the Body of Christ.

Our own ability to grow the Kingdom and teachings of Jesus should have everything to do with this covenant that each of us make with him in our hearts. We are the “walking time bomb of God’s love,” the “bursting seed of Jesus’ teaching.” We are the healing power of the Messiah, we are a force for peace in family and community, when we believe that Christ took our hand and said:

“I choose you and I empower you as my brother to do all these things in my name. Remember I will be with you always.”

There is the difference between our randomly taking up the Gospel word and preaching it and Jesus in Baptism choosing us to be his disciples. When Christ chooses you, as he does all who hear and respond to his word, you become ‘sacrament.’

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Do you remember how we described sacrament last week? Sacrament is the love and activity of God breaking into our world. All God needs is that gate to allow his grace to flow, whether it be Baptism, forgiveness or Eucharist or even matrimony. We too become sacramental when Jesus empowers us to go do what he started 2,000 years ago. When we do the work that Jesus began, we have in Paul's words "put on Christ." We become part of a salvific act; we become active in the world's salvation. Paul says we become other "Christs."

In our life that is a pretty powerful thought. If for one moment we ever truly believed that we are here to complete what Jesus started then we would tap into a power so great that miracles would be common phenomena in our lives.

As it is we flirt with the idea. Consequently we see 'little miracles.' They raise our eyebrows and make us wonder. We look back at the year that has passed and we see healings from Eileen to Katherine, from Karl to Richard, Susan, Pat, Irene and many more. Miracles do not happen because we deserve or are somehow entitled, miracles happen because our belief has opened the door to God's love and God's life mingles with ours.

Miracles happen when we stop seeing Jesus as a distant figure on a cross of wood and instead spend 5 minutes talking to him in the quiet holy moment of our day. Each of you know this to be true, because you remember all too well, the day you sank to your knees at the first time you heard "real bad news" and said "God please help me." And you know you never prayed so real or so sincerely in all your life. Whether it was for your wife or your child, you knew it was time for the power of God to act.

That is what the words: "I believe" really mean. We do not know Jesus when we refuse to spend even 5 minutes a day with him. And we can scoff all we like about right wing Evangelicals and their fundamentalist beliefs, but people, they believe, they believe. They study their Bible. They want to know more about Jesus their Lord and Savior. They have the hunger.

Today, we have to ask ourselves the question: "Where is our hunger?"

Francis of Assisi was a little monk in the 12th. century who had a great belief. He lived a simple life of work and prayer. He had no clue how holy he was, God's life and his life had become one. The marks of Jesus crucifixion appeared on his hands and feet. He was such a good person the animals and birds came and rested upon him. As this week we celebrate Francis' Feast day, let us learn from his simple faith. All you need is to believe that Jesus has the power to change your life for the better. Belief is a powerful force. It can bring hope where there was no hope. It can bring success where once there was only failure. It can transform.

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For all your belief in the last year, today we thank God and pray that like Francis our belief allows God's love to really flood our lives. We pray that our belief is strong enough to allow us to spend 5 minutes a day with our Lord and Savior. 5 minutes, where we learn what he is about and what his face really looks like. Five minutes to learn that "yes we are chosen and valued and we have a job to do." 5 minutes to be briefed on how we can participate in salvation today.

5 minutes for God's love to touch our hearts and transform us from egotistical worm to disciple. When is the last time you gave the Son of God 5 minutes? 5 minutes is a cell phone call. Check it out. You have a message. Jesus Christ needs 5 minutes.

Amen+

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