

October 2, 2022

World Communion Sunday

Lamentations 1:1-6, 3:19-26

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10



1. Please take a look at these three paintings.
  - a. I would like to invite you to be an art critic and tell me who is the better artist. The painter of picture A, B, or C.
    - i. Raise your hand for A. For B. For C.
    - ii. Would it surprise you if I tell you that the same artist painted all three?
    - iii. These are all Pablo Picasso paintings A from 1896, B from 1901 and C from 1916.
  - b. I suppose that an art historian would tell us about the different periods of his work (A is Early, B is his Blue Period, and C is his Cubism Period).
    - i. The art historian could talk to us about influences, mentors, the pressure of producing art and making a living from it, the drive to create something entirely new. All of that is true.
  - c. But this is a sermon and not an art lecture.
    - i. Picasso didn't get more talented between A and C. Sure, he had more hours of practice.
    - ii. Theologically, Picasso is seeing the world (or at least his world) from a new point of view in each painting.
2. All our passages today are about faith, and if we can use the Picasso example, the passages are about the perspectives or points of view of faith.
  - a. It would seem that the hardest time to keep the faith is in time of distress and destruction.
    - i. Faith is a gift from God allowing us to perceive the world as God perceives it.
    - ii. In the midst of desolation the writer of Lamentations sighs words addressed to God which we've set to music: great is thy faithfulness.
    - iii. But what a great challenge it is to perceive through faith when the world is on fire, when things aren't going as planned.

- iv. It is striking that it is at the lowest point of distress when the gift of faith in the writer allowed them to say: *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*
- b. Feeling like a spiritual parent, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, whom he had known for a long time and whom he had helped raise in the faith.
  - i. And in this passage, it is the faith of his grandmother and his mother which first get highlighted, a faith that was present also in Timothy.
  - ii. Again, a gift from God.
  - iii. But it is then instructive to think of how that gift is present through three generations.
  - iv. But as with the talent of a painter, the gift of faith is best when put to use, when tended to.
  - v. Paul speaks of it as kindling the gift of faith that God had given Timothy (and his mother and grandmother).
    - 1. Paul, by the way, isn't writing this letter to Timothy from a beach resort while on vacation.
    - 2. He's writing from prison, jailed because preaching the counter cultural message of Jesus was being seen as threatening to the social order and to the Roman empire.
  - vi. Keith Weedman, who is a long time member of the church, coaches leaders on how to perceive the world creatively.
    - 1. He has been very generous in mentoring me, and I get to share his material in presentations with people who are taking the week-long Bartholomew County Works training program, which is offered monthly to people looking to reenter the work force.
    - 2. I make a connection between Keith's notion of perceiving the world creatively and having the faith God has given us.
    - 3. Through faith we each have the ability to see as God sees, but we're challenged because there are obstacles to our faith fully blossoming.
    - 4. Kindling that gift of faith, elevating our skills to perceive creatively (as Keith articulates is), is about staying focused on seeing with God's eyes, with faith.
- c. Which then brings us to Jesus' disciples in the gospel passage.
  - i. In our text they make a request that may sound like a good request, even a great request from the people who worked closest to Jesus: Increase our faith! Make us more faithful!
    - 1. But Jesus wasn't impressed by the request.
    - 2. It seems, in fact, as if he's a little annoyed by it.

3. Bigger isn't better, for one. If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you'd be able to do amazing things!
  4. Secondly, you're underestimating the gift you already have.
  - ii. Again, back to Picasso. He wasn't working on being more talented.
    1. He was working on letting the talent he had find expression, different expression, in his art.
    2. Jesus is teaching that it isn't about getting more faith, or about working to strengthen it, but it is about letting faith take center stage, without us or our egos trying to steal the limelight.
  - iii. Jesus then tries to clarify by giving what seems like a really obscure (and maybe even offensive) example of how and what a slave ought to do.
    1. Let's acknowledge up front that it is very problematic that Jesus is using the violent and degrading institution of slavery as an example of how to live as God wants us to.
    2. It becomes even more problematic when we ponder if the reason for his example is the audience's familiarity with slavery (did they own slaves?).
    3. Holding that tension there without going into another sermon to deal with it, let me direct us back to Reed and Matthews, who point out the phrase in the passage "we are worthless slaves" and suggest that the Greek could point instead to something like "We are [slaves] and we have no need – that is, we are not owed anything." p.480. Jesus perhaps is saying: you have what you need; it's not that you need more, it's that you need to do what God is expecting you to do with it: live by faith.
3. You and I, we have faith. It is a gift God has given us.
- a. Many people, I would say, perhaps ALL people have been given that gift from God. But what does it do in us?
  - b. I have experienced children as being uninhibited about doing art.
    - i. I have masterpieces taped all over my office, drawings and paintings done by children in this congregation and preschool.
    - ii. I ask them to tell me about this picture and they tell me WHAT THEY SEE.
    - iii. It is their talent, and it is their drawing.
    - iv. Tragically, they'll face discouragement from someone saying "that's not how you draw a house" or whatever. Some kids may come to think: "I'm not an artist."
    - v. These children ought to be our teachers in creativity and courage, and instead some think they don't know anything yet and we have to "teach it to them."
    - vi. Elsewhere in the scriptures, Jesus presents children as examples of faith.

1. When we acknowledge that we have that small seed of faith in us, when we un-learn the external messages which make us question ourselves, when we let ourselves see through God's eyes (that is, through faith),
  2. then that's when the world looks hopeful in the midst of tragedy;
  3. that's when injustice is unmasked, and the fear to combat it dissipates;
  4. that's when we are able to forgive because we see God's larger picture.
4. See the world through eyes of faith. That faith will let you see God's love, God's justice, God's peace in you and around you. It is that seed of faith in us, in spite of that may be swirling around us, it is that faith that makes it possible to hope in despair, to actively oppose injustice, to tirelessly work for peace.

Reflection questions:

1. Who helped nurture your faith?
2. Share a story of a distressing time when your faith helped you see clearly God's way for you.

Sources:

Wisdom Commentary, *Luke 10-24*. Barbara E. Reid, OP and Shelly Matthews. Liturgical Press: Collegeville MN. 2021. P.477-80

Interpretation. *First and Second Timothy and Titus*. Thomas C. Oden. Louisville: John Knox Press. 1989. p. 31

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-27-3/commentary-on-luke-175-10-5>

<https://www.pablo-ruiz-picasso.net/periods.php>

(A) PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S MOTHER Portrait de la mère de l'artiste. 1896.

(B) ABSINTHE DRINKER. Buveur d'Absinthe. 1901.

(C) PORTRAIT OF AMBROISE VOLLARD Portrait d'Ambroise Vollard. 1910.