

St. PAUL'S CHURCH
5 Pentecost - Proper 8-B (RCL, track one)

Wellsboro, PA
30 June 2024

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 8: 7-15
Mark 5: 21-43

*WHY ISN'T IT WORKING? -
The Way I Want!
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Just a couple of weeks ago, I heard Jesus say,
“...whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.”

John 15:16

And in today's Gospel, we have examples of that kind of faith:
Jairus who kneels before Jesus asking for his daughter to be healed;
and the un-named woman, she who believes if she but touches Jesus,
she will be healed.

Though we wonder why it doesn't always work that way.

What I'd really like is to avoid all the questions
and show my archeology slides of Ziklag, that city of David
mentioned in the Old Testament reading.
I spent a whole summer during college digging up Ziklag.

But we need to ask a harder question,
one which seldom has a good answer,
when a priest or chaplain sits with a family member in hospital.
Why doesn't it work that way?

Didn't Jesus promise?
“...whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.”

John 15:16

Do you know my friend Job?
What did he do wrong?
And King Saul today?
What did *he* do wrong?

You may not know much about King Saul,
so allow me to give a little back-ground.

We've heard some of it these past weeks, but it's review time.
The people of Israel wanted a king to lead them after having escaped Egypt.
Samuel the prophet was urged, against his own best inclinations,
to appoint a king over them, basically abandoning God as their king.
There's an “in-between” last week's story of David and Goliath and today's reading.
A summary from Thomas Dozeman, of United Seminary in Dayton.

“After waiting seven days [as promised] for a tardy Samuel to arrive at Gilgal in order to perform a sacrifice for holy war against the Philistines, Saul took the responsibility upon himself [to perform the sacrifice], prompting a curse from Samuel (once he got there) and the prediction of the downfall of his house. This is

the beginning of the end for Saul. ... the next thing we learn is that one of God's evil spirits - *one of God's evil spirits!* - is set loose to torment him, while behind the scenes, and unbeknownst to Saul, a new king [little David the shepherd-boy] is already chosen. At this point it becomes clear that Saul is destined for his suicidal death, but not before he sinks into insanity. [And it is little David who is called upon to play the harp and sing when melancholy sets in upon the King!]"

Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Abingdon Press, 1993

Several messages here:

- 1) don't presume to celebrate Mass when the priest is late;
- 2) God *does* have evil spirits on his side, when he needs them;
- 3) insanity can lead to suicide; and,
- 4) watch out for the harp-player.

Professor Bozeman concludes:

Saul is a tragic figure because his fate is far worse than his actions. Does he really deserve divine indifference and then divine hostility?

There are so many questions here:

Why would God act that way?

Would *our* God act that way?

Why *do* bad things happen to good people?

It's all a matter of theodicy - that seminary theological term,
with which we struggle - the justice of God.

It's easy in the Gospel to hear Christ's unswerving grace and blessing
to those who draw near in faith

and receive the healing and peacefulness they so desire.

And yet we look at Job, Saul, and even David who comes next,
and wonder about how God works.

What is in God's plan for salvation?

Why does God do thus and so on one hand,
and work on a totally other scale with others.

Who is favored, and why aren't we, when we try so hard?

Why doesn't God listen to me when I tell him what to do?

The other day I was watching one of my old Western TV shows.

A 'Faith Healer' comes to town, and through the story two of his former 'patients'
from another town accosts him as their healing has failed.

Their problem - they trusted in the faith-healer and not on God.

As soon as their faith dissipated when he left town,
their dis-ease returned, and they blamed him.

It reminds me of Peter trying to walk towards Jesus on the Sea of Galilee
a few weeks ago.

Theodicy, or our understanding of it, is really at the core
a matter of relationship - our relationship with God.

In the passage from John's Gospel I mentioned some time ago,

we heard on the sixth week of Easter,
Jesus tells us that divine love is the ultimate responsibility:
“If you love me, you will keep my commandment - and this is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you.” *John 15: 9-17*

But we do love, we counter - that's why we're praying for Sally to be healed.
We do love. but are we in love with God?
Are our prayers filled with divine love - or selfish love.
I have to be brutal here - death is not always a bad thing!
I had a 90-yo parishioner when I was in seminary
awaiting open heart surgery - at 90+
Her faith statement to me was,
“There are two options - I come through fine, or I don't.
Either is fine with me. Anything in between is not.”
She knew where she was coming from, and eventually where she was going.
She trusted in God to do what God needed and wanted to do with her.

In private God confronts Job (in rather snotty terms, I have to admit)
that God is in control and Job is not.
“Who is this that offers counsel without having knowledge?
Where were you when I formed the world?
Tell me, and I will listen.”

So, Father, where is the Good News to take home?
I sit with the Psalm-writer in the pit of ashes.
*Out of the depths, I call to you, O God: hear my voice!
Who could stand, O God, if you were to count our sins?
Yet there is forgiveness with you, therefore you shall be feared.*

The English for fear falls short, it is more, in the Hebrew and Greek,
a matter of trembling awe, wonder and majesty
and even sublime joy before the divine presence.
It is a falling down on the knees in reverence
when we apprehend something totally un-explainable,
something that goes way beyond our comprehension.
We often end our service with the blessing:
*May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your heart
and mind in the knowledge and love of God.*
That faith, that hope, that longing, is how the Psalmist sits in awe,
*I wait for the Lord; my soul longs for him.
Like the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my heart for God.
Wait for the Lord, O Israel, God's People, for with the Lord there is mercy.
With him there is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem you.*
To trust that God is in command of a greater good,
greater than we can comprehend.
Then shall our eyes be opened
and we will see the salvation of our God.

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Trust in the Lord.

Wait for the Lord.

Kneel in awe-filled reverence.

Trust that God has more wisdom than we could ever hope to have.

AMEN.