

Homily
November 17th, 2024
26th Sunday After Pentecost
Proper 28

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

The collect for today and this week is what I consider a practical prayer calling for us to take action in a sound educational manner. Now that sounds like an intellectual dissecting of what is supposed to be talking with God. What the prayer says is that the Lord caused all scripture to be written for our learning. The collect doesn't say that scripture is intended to be easy to understand or even understandable. Scripture is not easy to understand. Sometimes that which appears to be obvious is not actually the intended meaning of scripture. Learning occurs by cracking open scripture and seeing what is revealed to us. Our prayer says that to do that, we must hear and read scripture which we do in each of our worship services; but, this collect adds that we need to also mark, learn, and inwardly digest holy Scripture.

Today's prayer is the favorite collect of our former rector, the Rev. Shariya Molegoda. Some of us were forced to become more familiar with this collect because "read, mark, learn" was the password for our wi-fi. That proved to be a difficult password for us; hence, it has been changed.

The collect also includes our blessed hope of everlasting life. By actively studying the scriptures we may hold fast to the blessed hope of everlasting life. That brings a smile to my face and a sense of comfort; and, I hope that prayer brings that same feeling to you. It is faith which enables us to embrace the hope of everlasting life. And, it is faith which resonated as I studied the scriptures appointed for today.

Some of us may feel that our faith is currently being challenged. Faith is a word used frequently; but, have you thought about what it actually means? So, what I did was go to the Anchor Bible Dictionary to read about faith. The Anchor Dictionary entry for faith covers 17 pages. Those of you in the EFM class probably don't doubt that since you are reading theology.

In the Old Testament, faith is expressed as sustaining, supporting, and/or carrying. Faith is also the unswerving loyalty to Yahweh even in

the face of what seems like insurmountable obstacles – just think of Job. Then, with the birth of Christ, his ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension followed by the Early Church, the verb faith in the New Testament came to mean “to believe.” To believe is what I normally think of as faith. Greek words associated with the root word for faith correspond to belief, confidence, and trust.

With that primer on faith, let us move to the Old Testament story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel. Since I was a child this story has been dear to me, as well as God’s calling of Samuel. The reading from I Samuel tells that Hannah was touted by her husband’s other wife. The other wife, Peninnah, is jealous of Hannah because their husband, Elkanah, loves Hannah so much that he showers her with favoritism.

The reason I am so fond of this story is this little book entitled *The Child of the Temple*. My parents read this to me at bedtime. Jumping ahead many years ... when George and I spent one or two months on South Padre Island, we would attend the Episcopal Church in Port Isabel. Father Phil was the rector there. I was in my formation to be a deacon at that time; so, I spoke to Father Phil about his philosophy/approach to

sermons. Father Phil made the obvious point that the scriptures are difficult. He saw his role as breaking the readings down so that they could be easily understood. The children's sermons at the school of his previous church had given him a lot of practice doing just that.

So, with that seeming bit of permission from Father Phil, I am going to take the liberty of restating the story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel by reading this children's version of the story. You will notice that the story has been "cleaned up" so to speak as there is no direct reference to the second wife. [Read story to children or adults, if no children present.]

This little book made me realize that Hannah didn't tell the priest Eli what she was praying for. Hannah had faith/the belief that God would grant her petition – that of a son. What faith Hannah had! Hannah didn't wait until she was pregnant to be sad no longer. Upon hearing Eli's words, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him," Hannah was able to eat and drink again.

Now moving to our Epistle and focusing on the second portion of the reading for the day, we are reminded that Christ removed all obstacles to our access to God. Prior to Christ, the ancient worshippers literally stood

outside the sanctuary awaiting the exit of the high priest.

With access to God established in this reading from Hebrew, the author moves on to stating three admonitions, two of which include the word faith or a form of the word. The first admonition is “let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” In other words, we are to approach with sincerity and integrity the worshipping of our living God. Here at Grace we have multiple opportunities to worship God in community. We have our two services on Sunday and our 12:10 Wednesday service. We also have the opportunity to pray in community on Thursday mornings at 8:30 on Zoom. Starting the day with Morning Prayer sets the stage for a Christ filled day. If your schedule permits, I encourage you to consider joining us for prayer on Thursday mornings. The service is certainly completed by 9:00 o’clock. Or, you can watch our Morning Prayer service later on Facebook.

In the second admonition, we are to hold fast, in an unwavering way, to hope which is grounded in the trustworthiness, the faithfulness of Christ. This type of hope is described as “the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*. Confidence and firmness should

characterize our hope no matter how bad issues in our country, our world, and/or our personal life seem.

The third admonition is to provoke one another to love and good deeds. Bill, Matt Krause, and David Heise, and I heard our immediate past Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, say a lot about the power of love this weekend at the Diocesan Convention. This third admonition in Hebrews encourages us to meet together as a community of Grace to encourage each other. That can be particularly important as we face the unknown. Besides meeting together in worship, we also have the opportunity to come together for study, as the collect for this week encourages. During adult forum, we were studying the lectionary scriptures assigned for each respective Sunday. We also study together Thursday evenings at 7:00 to learn and share the personal meaning of a chapter or two of a book. Currently the book we are studying is *Faith after Doubt*. The women of the church have the opportunity to come together to support each other through Bible study which occurs the third Thursday of each month in the vestry room downstairs. Education for Ministry (EFM) is definitely a means of study and forming community. Grace's first class is

currently occurring with a second class to begin in September. New participants will be welcomed into that class as well as more parishioners being encouraged to participate the other opportunities to study.

Service is another way to come together as a community of Grace and get to know each other better so that we can be more supportive of each other. For example, as community, we work together to maintain the Lohman Prayer Garden at the Salvation Army under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Krause. We certainly exemplify love by the good deed of taking a tag or tags from the Christmas tree in the narthex so that the incarcerated parents and their children can have a happier Christmas. If you are not already participating in these opportunities of worship, study and service, I encourage you to consider such. What opportunities fit within your work, school, and family life? Maybe, if you are working from home, you have more flexibility with when your work hours are.

In closing, how is your faith in God? Does it need some bolstering. As our scripture says, we need each other as we proceed with our Christian lives. We need to meet together and encourage each other in our faith. Despite strong winds, divine presence will not be blown away.

Amen