

Sermon Proper 6  
Year B  
CCM  
June 13, 2021

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I was somewhat surprised by what I read in a magazine article recently. Apparently, one of the growing trends for those who are graduating from high school and preparing to enter college these days is to take “a gap year.” I mean it does make sense to me that, during this past year and several months when COVID has dominated our lives, that many graduates would choose to defer their first year in college rather than spending it at home and online. However, this trend actually started over a decade ago and will continue to grow even as it looks as if students will be back on campus come this fall.

There’s even an organization called the Gap Year Association that assists students in making plans for the year, a year they describe as being “not a year off, but a year on.”

Instead of jumping right back into the pressures of academia, students choose to spend this time broadening their horizons. In seeking personal growth, they travel the world, learn a new language, take up a new instrument, paint, write, work in a national park or on a cattle ranch, train to run a marathon, or master the art of cooking. It is an opportunity to discern, to explore, to be open to new possibilities, to creatively grow and mature in order to better understand themselves and what it is that matters to them most before starting college. In other words, it is an intentional pause between the past and the future, between what was and what will be. It is about what we call “the meantime” and it is proof that “meantime” can be a very valuable moment in our physical and spiritual journeys.

In this morning’s reading from 2 Corinthians, it seems to me that Paul is also speaking about “the meantime” when it comes to the Christian faith and life: “So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”

Do we understand what Paul is saying here? He sees this transitory life that you and I are sharing this morning as “the meantime.” He longs for the eternal future, the “then”, when we will be gathered again to the God who loved us first and brought us into being. But in this meantime, in this here and now, we live by faith, confident

that God remains with us every step we take in this lifetime...these days in between our births and our deaths.

And, and according to Paul, in this meantime, we have one shared purpose, individually and collectively. It is our goal, our aim to use Paul's language, to please God. With all that we have and all that we are, we are to please God. Not ourselves, but God alone.

That sounds simple. But as we all know, it is the simple things in life that are the most difficult to accomplish! Throughout the Bible, we hear what God calls us to do in this meantime. As the prophet Micah writes, "He has told you O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God." In his first letter to the congregation in Corinth, Paul declares, " And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." Furthermore, "Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful...Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

This is what our days in between are to be about. This is how we are to please God. Sounds so simple. But of course, it's not.

That leads us into the two parables Jesus shares in this morning's reading from Mark's Gospel. At the heart of both stories is faith, faith that is rooted entirely in trust. In the first, Jesus points out that the farmer really has two tasks to accomplish. The first is to plant the seed. The second is to harvest. Beyond that, there is "the meantime" when "the seed sprouts and grows, he does not know how." The meantime is all about God and entirely up to God. In the parable, the farmer is not to fret about weeding or fertilizing or interceding in any way. Instead, the farmer is simply called to trust God to bring the grain to fruition. This, my friends, is a kingdom parable. Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of God initiated in Jesus' birth will come to fruition because God is at work to make it so and nothing will stop this from happening. In the parable, the farmer does not have to intercede. All he has to do is trust. In this parable, the farmer pleases God by having faith, by trusting in God, and in the harvest (read kingdom) Jesus has come to proclaim.

The parable of the mustard seed reveals even more about God's kingdom to those who have ears and are truly willing to listen. While the work of the Holy Spirit might initially seem so negligible, as tiny as a mustard seed, once sown, the end result is a mighty shrub in which all can find shade, shelter, and protection. Once again, the beauty of the parable rests in the realization that the end result is not dependent on the work of the people. The growth is entirely up to God. We are simply called to please God, by listening for the still, small voice of God in our prayers and in our worship, by trusting in God, and then in response, making it our greatest goal in these days in between, in this meantime, to please Him. In other words, if we remain faithful, God will give us life and will guide our growth

I will acknowledge one other truth before concluding this morning. We don't always like "meantimes" in our lives, do we? We human beings are creatures of habit. We don't really like uncertainty. We are not always eager to step into the gaps in our lives because frankly we are adverse to the unknown and the changes that the unknown might require. Frankly, there is a reason that it is reported that the seven last words of the Church are actually, "We've never done it that way before." (Yes, I know that "we've" is actually a contraction!)

Please know that I believe in tradition and I honor tradition. There is much about tradition that serves to preserve and protect that which has become valuable to us and to our communities. I only grow concerned about tradition when it prevents God from planting new seeds in our midst, seeds that the Holy Spirit hopes and desires will bring about new growth in our midst. You see, God's kingdom is coming. Nothing will stop it. Our aim throughout these days of our in between is to trust God entirely and to make it our aim to please Him. A gap year is an opportunity to focus together on doing exactly that.

Amen.