

Pentecost 13-B
8/22/21 CTK

Eph. 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

We had some drama at the Buchan house this week - our refrigerator just quit working! The compressor broke or something – there was water everywhere. Can't be fixed, so we're waiting for a new fridge to come – it's supposed to come today. We have been camping basically, using coolers as an ice-box. Just keeping Piggly Wiggly in business by buying all their ice.

It's a bit of a pain in the neck and one that could seem like a disaster, but something that someday we'll look back on and laugh about it.

On the world stage, on the other hand, this week really has been a disaster. The nightmare in Afghanistan; relentless images of wildfires decimating our forests and disrupting lives out west; Haiti hit with a deadly earthquake one day and then a tropical storm on the next; a UN report on climate-change telling us that this is just the beginning; and the cloud that hangs over us all, COVID; a Delta variant and a great surge of cases worldwide just when we thought it was safe; our local officials at each other's throats over mask mandates.

How often we thought to ourselves, not just this week but throughout our lives, "How could anybody go on without faith in God?" Not that we shirk our responsibilities become passive. We don't throw our hands up and say, "I don't have to get a vaccination, it's all in God's hands." After all, as say in our catechism that "we pray that we will be a part of God's reign as it comes." We want to do our part for the kingdom. But we also confess that we believe that God's reign will come whether we pray for it or not. The victory is won. We just want to be part of it.

In today's gospel we see that some of Jesus' followers did lose their faith in him and they did turn away. He kept saying things they didn't understand – welcome to the club - commanding his followers to eat him, eat his flesh and drink his blood. They were confused and Jesus kept confronting them with these images, forcing them to chew and gnaw, and keep grinding away at this truth of his Enfleshment, his Incarnation in flesh and blood, his presence in humanity. Trying to help us realize that we meet him, the Christ, in one another. "This saying is difficult!" some say and fall away. "Who can accept it?" they ask?

With Peter, we say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Peter and the rest of the twelve are in way too deep to turn back now, and isn’t that true for us, too? We’ve hitched our wagon to Jesus, and when things get tough, that’s no time to lose faith. Lord, to whom shall we go? What other choice do we have?!

Just a few years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, after Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit and his own conversion, the Apostle Paul wrote urgently to the church in Ephesus about a universe full of what he calls “spiritual forces of evil.” Paul was not a scientific person, unlike us who are scientific people and who try to be careful about superstition. But does it ever feel like there are forces of evil in the world? Not just when something annoying happens like your fridge breaks, but when we see the atrocities of terrorists like the Taliban or when we find ourselves putting our own vanity before the good of humanity or when we see how one tribe can be so cruel to another.

Paul believed that there were powers and principalities in the world, empires and thrones, forces that we don’t understand at work on us. Forces that convince us that they are too big to fail. Cosmic powers of darkness that are arrayed against God as in battle. When we look back on last week’s news, and we look deeply at the roots of current events, that doesn’t seem so far-fetched today. Paul saw the struggles of the life as a kind of war of good against evil. Of life against death, hope against fear, light against darkness. That’s what this passage from Ephesians today is about. Not a war of guns and bombs, but, a spiritual war.

But Paul knew, and this is the main point to remember, this is the good news, that God has won already! In the little struggles and the big struggles of our lives and of the world, when things seem to overwhelm us, Paul wants us to remember that the war is won. We can say it in a lot of different ways, but somehow the key is in the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is the central reminder, the symbol that the struggle has been decided in our favor by an all-loving God who created all that is and declared it to be good and who is willing to live and suffer and even die as one of us.

For some reason, we don’t know why, God allows these skirmishes, battles, and struggles personal and universal, to continue. The great Christian writer C.S. Lewis, who wrote during and after WWII, compared the Christian life to the French underground after D-Day. The war was essentially over, yet the Nazis continued their evil fight. So it was essentially a cleanup operation – a dangerous one – but one in which the outcome was already decided. Paul sounds the battle

cry for these struggles against the powers of darkness: put on the armor of God, he cries; the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. Don't get discouraged! The reign of God will come whether we pray for it or not, but we pray that we can be a part of it.

So, finally, Paul says, pray. Pray for him, pray for ourselves, pray for each other. We even pray for our enemies. And knowing that the victory is won, we fight on, and trust, in the words of the great mystic Julian of Norwich, that all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.

Amen