

FAITH FOR OUR CHILDREN

Year C – Proper 22 – October 3, 2004 -The Rev'd. Dr. Patrick R. Close

This morning we are baptizing Livey Kegler. We welcome another child into our faith community. This service this morning raises a question for me. Will the next generations of our children have faith? We live in immensely difficult times. The world is a harsh and dangerous place. How will we give our children faith? Maybe we place Bibles under their pillows tonight and they will gain it by osmosis. Do you think that will work?

How will our children and others come to believe if we're afraid to talk about God? Faith comes from our knowing God. The nature of God is that of a lover, a giver and an inviter. But what is our response to this God? We shake with fear. We ignore God and hope the Divine will go away. When that doesn't work, we run in the opposite direction away from God! Why are we afraid? All God wants from us is a response ... we call it faith.

Today's Biblical readings talk about faith. Maybe they will help us to raise up Livey and our children as Christians. The prophet Habakkuk is our first spokesman. He is speaking to Israel in the late 7th century BC. Habakkuk is challenging the people of God to change their ways. Violence and injustice rather than faith prevail. He warns them that God will use the Chaldeans to be an instrument of judgment.

Do you know who the Chaldeans are? They are also known as the Babylonians. Where is Babylon? We know it as Iraq today! God used the Chaldeans to bring judgment upon Israel. Are we witnessing the same thing today? Where is our faith in these times? Habakkuk's reading ends with talk of a vision. What is our vision as Christians today?

What we learn is that the vision of faith that holds on in the face of adversity. The Israelites would be carried off into captivity. Some of them would hold onto and even deepen their faith because of this trial. What we see is that those who commit their lives to God will find what they really need in life. There is no longer cause for despair, anger or fear with this vision!

The next reading is Paul's letter to Timothy. Here faith is described about trusting in the Lord, in Jesus. Livey will need to know this. Who will tell her and teach her this? We learn from this passage that Timothy's mother and grandmother; Eunice and Lois pass on the faith to him. In the life of Israel, the women were those who taught the children values and faith. Sorry fellows. We don't have as good a track record as they do! Maybe we can change that!

I think of my grandmothers and mother. They had a lot to do with shaping my faith today. My paternal grandmother, Gea, taught me a love for music. She helped me see the Divine in music. She was a paid church soloist. She helped me to nurture music as a part of my spiritual journey.

My maternal grandmother was "Little Grandma." She only stood four foot ten, but claimed she was five foot! Little Grandma was a farmer's wife. She made sure I got to Church with one of my aunts. What I remember most about her was the love and concern

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she shared for others. I can't remember how many people came to live with her over the years. I came to learn that she would welcome anyone with a warm meal and a bed ... no questions asked.

My mother was much like her. She took in many people. She made sure I was in church. She made every effort to help me grow spiritually. She was among the first to support my decision to become a priest. My mother was there at every major part of my faith journey. I find myself much like her today. You can ask Diane, my wife, about the number of people I have brought home!

It will be up to you, Livey's parents, grandparents, godparents and the rest of us to help her and all the children come to faith. Timothy had a willingness to pursue God's will and way. His family helped him do it. Now it's up to us to be there for Livey! We are called to be heralds like Timothy and Paul. We are to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to be living testimonies to the faith. We will need to unpackage the Gospel for Livey and others ... and to make it relevant for today.

Now we need to see what Jesus had to say about faith. The Gospel talks about life in the community of faith. The disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith! Have you ever noticed that Jesus doesn't give us what we ask for? He does the unexpected. Jesus talks about a mustard seed. It's the smallest of seeds and yet faith this size can produce large miracles! The mustard seed illustration used by Jesus says that it's genuine faith, not quantity of faith that makes a difference! The basis of a true Christian community consists of faith. That faith exists in the knowing and proclaiming the reality of God!

There is an old Buddhist parable about a mustard seed that might help us understand the point better. A young woman's only son died. She was distraught and sought out the wise old monk who lived in the village. She hoped that he would have the medicine that would bring her son back to life. The monk told her that he could perform a miracle if she could find some mustard seed. The only other stipulation was that it comes from a house that did not know suffering.

The woman set out to search for the cure. She saw a large mansion on a hill. She knew they would have the mustard seed. She looked at the wealth all around her and thought to herself that this was surely a place that never experienced suffering. A servant answered the door and listened to her request for mustard seed. She returned with it. But when the woman asked the servant if the house had ever known suffering, she was surprised at the answer. The servant looked sad and shared that their master had just died that very morning. The next house it was much the same ... ill parents.

On and on it went for the woman for her search. Along the way, something happened. She was changed. As she listened to the tales of suffering, she forgot her own suffering. She would stop at times and suspend her search, and help those who were hurting. Years later she returned to the monk. When he asked about the mustard seed she answered yes she had found it. But she learned that all people suffer. She came to

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know that life was unpredictable. The mustard seed worked a miracle. She was changed. She would go on to become a disciple.

What are we looking for in life? The human soul yearns for faith. It seeks connection, communion with God. Do we vocalize our faith? We are Episcopalians ... we don't like to talk about God. Why is that? If we ask each other something personal or to share something about the family ... the words flow! It comes easy to share our favorite stores and we learn a lot about each other. We need to learn how to do this when it comes to talking about God as well!

There are those in our world that are willing to proclaim, even shout out their faith. Islamic terrorists proclaim their faith with horrible violence. Last week, in Valley Forge, white supremacists gathered to proclaim their hate and anger. Politicians lightly talk of faith when it will support their re-election. Are we going to let them be the only voices? Why don't we speak up about what we believe?

How will Livey and the other children know about faith? We are afraid, we are uncomfortable. We feel we don't know enough to speak. This is where we can start small. All it takes is to look for the small sightings, the simple stories. As we learn to share these, faith grows and miracles begin to happen!

It's as simple as answering this question, "Where have you met God this past week?" We have been doing this at the end of staff meetings and vestry meetings. Now many of the people at these meetings are looking for God in the day-to-day. We feel more comfortable sharing with other. We are becoming a witnessing faith community! From the small seeds come bigger miracles.

We have a vision of faith in our community. We look to see our faith, and the faith of our children increase. We have the capacity to grow. It just takes a little practice. The journey of faith helps us to discover that God loves to give to us. Our faith increases with our ability to give. This means we have to let go our desire and compulsion to control. It means we can't withhold time, love, care and cash. We have to replace our compulsions with trust and generosity.

The vision we are called to live for our children is one of faith. If our children are to have faith, we must have faith! Faith has the power to move mountains. Even the smallest amount of it can do great things. It starts with our willingness to share, to tell the story.

This past week, I have a moment closest to God. I was checking in at Cooper Hospital to visit a sick parishioner. A woman saw me and asked if I was a priest. Well, I was dressed all in black and had a white collar. I didn't enter into a debate about being an Episcopal priest or Roman Catholic. I simply said yes. She asked me if I would pray for her husband.

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I asked her what her husband's name was ... she said John. She shared that he had been mugged this morning. The doctors weren't sure he would live. I asked her name, it was Leslie. We held hands and prayed for John, for Leslie and for the mugger. It felt like a powerful moment to me.

Now, if it is going to take me buying all of you black suits and ordering white collars, I will need to get your sizes right after the service. Or we can try to in small ways start sharing the stories of where we meet God. We can embrace the vision, be people of faith, and let our children know our stories. Do we have faith? If not, it is time for us to seek God. Do we have faith? Then it is time for us to share the stories ... for the children ... for Livey ... for ourselves.

So tell me, where have you met God recently?