

Homily for Third Sunday After Easter

First Lesson: 2 Samuel 12:15-23 (King James Version)

15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

16 David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

17 And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

18 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to

tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?

19 But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore, David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.

20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.

21 Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.

22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

Second Lesson: John 14:1-14 (King James Version)

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father.

13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Psalms 36:5-12, 138

Introduction

I spent my childhood in the small town of Pocatello, Idaho. When I was seventeen years old, I left my home to go to college. I packed up my chevy spectrum and headed west to Salem, Oregon where I was going to further my education. I said goodbye to my family and friends, and full of excitement and honestly a lot of fear, I made the fifteen-hour drive to Salem, anxiously awaiting my new adventure. I remember unloading all of my possessions into the tiny dorm room where I would live until the summer and looked around for a pay phone to call home and let my parents know I had arrived. I talked to my father, he was excited for me, and glad I had gotten there safe and sound. I promised to call him the next afternoon to let him know what classes I had chosen.

The next morning, I was standing in line in the university commons, preparing to go around and sign up for my initial classes. A pat on my shoulder turned me around and I saw the concerned face of a man I later learned was the University chaplain. He ushered me to his office and asked me to call home. Sitting in his huge leather chair, I learned my father had died during the night. To say I was shocked would be an understatement, I was numb. Arrangements were made and I ended up turning around and flying home.

Despite not wanting to be away from my family, my mother insisted I return to school and finish what I had started. Hesitantly, I agreed, but emotionally and mentally I was a mess. The first year of school was really difficult and I had to dig deep to stay the course. I learned to rely on the support of others, my family, and, above all, God. As the years went by, I became stronger and learned to cope with this staggering loss in the best way I could. I always missed Idaho and my family, and when I had a break from school or time off, I always drove home. Even if it was only for a brief time, the respite and connection I felt was worth the long drive.

During those years, I spent a lot of time in my car and often found myself listening to the radio. In the early 1990's, country music was always pleasant, and I found that was the genre I tended to listen to the most. I liked the stories they told and often, they were about faith. I remember on one trip back to Salem, right before graduation, I was missing my father a lot. I was almost finished with school and the thought of him not being there when I received my diploma was heart wrenching for me. I remember very clearly, just outside of Boise, a song came on the radio that touched me deeply. It started out about a boy who had gotten in trouble in school, and he was worried about telling his father about it. Despite expecting the worst, his father said to him gently, "Let me tell you a secret about a father's love, a secret that my daddy said was just between us. You see daddies don't just love their children every now and then, it is a love without end. Amen." As I heard this, my memory ignited many memories of how my own father had reassured me that he was there for me despite doing things I knew I should not have done or when life's disappointments were present. I never doubted he loved me or had my best interests at heart.

The song continued to when the author was now a father and is raising a boy of his own. He states, "and when I thought my patience had been tested to the end, I took my daddy's secret, and I passed it on to him" and we repeat the chorus about a father's love, a love without end, Amen. By now I was thinking about my own life and how I wanted to have kids someday. It was a sweet notion, but one that was far ahead of me. Still, I had a template and idea for how I wanted to be as a father.

The last verse of the song was really powerful for me to hear. The author then tells how he had dreamed that he died and was standing outside the gates of heaven. He says, "When suddenly I realized there must be some mistake. If they know half the things I have done, they

will never let me in, and then somewhere from the other side, I heard these words again. “You see fathers don’t just love their children every now and then, it is a love without end. Amen.” Suddenly, I started to think about my own faith and how, even when I did not ask or pray for it, I found reassurance and comfort from beyond this world. During some of my darkest days following his death, I found myself sitting in a pew in St. Mark’s Episcopal church in Salem. Just sitting there quietly and asking God to get me through it. My father had often told me not to pray for things to go away, but to ask God for the strength to endure and get to a better place. My resolve during those times was built on a foundation of my own faith and being raised in the church, but one that was tested many times over the years. Hearing that song, many, many years ago, reminded me that God’s love is never ending. He never left me, and as I look back now, I recognize the truth that God really does work, “*all things together for the good of those who love Him*” (Rom 8:28). Today, as I look toward ordination to the diaconate, this memory reminds me of how my faith in God over the years helped me to move forward, to rebuke the incessant voice of the enemy, and to stay focused on God’s love.

Body

John 14 verse 1 (Jesus reassures his disciples. This reassurance is meant to strengthen their faith during challenging times.)

In our reading today from the Gospel of John, we hear the encouraging and reassuring words of Jesus meant to strengthen our faith, especially during hard or challenging times. “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*” (v.1)

I am quite sure that all of us here this morning, and about everyone you know, are dealing with something that is troubling them. Anxiety about a new experience, worry about being sick, a loved one who is suffering, or dealing with pain or loss. In fact, struggling to cope with about

any of these experiences is troubling. Even watching the news and seeing the unrest and evil spawning from a broken world can create anxiety or stress in our lives. In these circumstances, having someone tell us to not worry or that “everything will turn out ok” often is not very comforting. Living in a broken world can be exceedingly difficult, but as Christians, we find hope and reassurance, peace and rest, in the meaning of the words of eternal comfort Jesus spoke to His disciples.

John 14 verse 2- 6 (Jesus tells his disciples that they will have a place in Heaven, with Jesus, and that: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Jesus is the only path to God.

This is where our faith, our hope and trust in God, come into play. Being told not to worry, not to be troubled, can be hard to accept unless it comes from someone we can really trust, or we know we can count on. It must come from someone we know loves us and will be present with us during all of the troubles of life. When Jesus tells Thomas that “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (v.6)*” our Lord assures Thomas, and all of us, that He is with us, will guide us, and is the only path to salvation.

This truth is seen in the example of St. Paul who was no stranger to suffering, to isolation and to trouble. In his Epistle to the Romans, he states, “*Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Rom. 8:37-39) We indeed live in a broken world, and it can be difficult to endure, but as Christians, we can find hope, reassurance and peace in the knowledge that no matter what happens in our lives, God is with us.

In the final part of our reading today, John 14, verse 7-15, Jesus establishes that knowing God the Father is the equivalent to knowing Him, their relationship is inseparable. In this scripture, Jesus promises that those who believe in Him will do even greater works than He did. Jesus is referring to broader, global impact of the gospel message, proclaimed by Christians, and empowered by the Holy Spirit that leads to the salvation and transformation of countless lives throughout history. This highlights the transforming power of faith.

Jesus tells that through Him, when we pray in His name, He shall hear our call. This passage encapsulates Jesus' role as the bridge between humanity and God, emphasizing the importance of faith, unity, and the transformative impact of belief.

Action

All of us will face trouble in our lives. All of us will suffer at one point or be close to others that are in distress. All of us will feel alone, confused and struggle to make sense of what is happening to us. David, in our first lesson, knew that despite the death of his child, God was still present, and he remained faithful and obedient. Also, when Jesus tells us that He is the only way to God, we are assured that He will be there for us. Together, these two lessons paint the undeniable truth that Jesus is present in our lives, and it is our belief in what lies ahead that will help us with any trouble we find.

Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist, psychologist, philosopher, and Holocaust survivor, said this: *“Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.”* We know what the why is. *“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).* When we believe this, we understand that Jesus is the *“way, the truth, and the life”* and we will begin to have hope for tomorrow. We will understand the why in all things. The meaning of life is that God created us in

His image, and He equipped us with heavenly gifts to glorify Him. As we go through life we will see that suffering, grief and loss, and tough times are present but so are many wonderful and amazing things. St. Paul tells us that we can rejoice in our suffering, *“knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* (Rom. 5:3-5). It is that hope and love in God, through the Holy Spirit, that we can navigate the How in life.

St. James stated, *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”* (James 1:12). It can be hard to endure, but we do not have to do it alone. We can pray, we can help each other, we can stay in faith, and we can be sure of what lies ahead. Often in my life, it has been the tough times that made me lean on and trust God more than ever before. I am reminded, through demanding times, that nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. No matter what is happening, no matter what we are going through, Jesus tells us, *“Believe in God. Believe also in me”* (v.1)

Conclusion

Victor Frankl who endured the horrors of a concentration camp during World War Two, said, “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.” In other words, as long as we have hope and something to live for, we can bear anything. In our journey through life, we encounter moments of grief, pain, and loss, alongside the joys and love that enrich our existence. As we age, these hardships may become more prevalent, demanding a deeper understanding and acceptance. We endure heartaches, confront our mortality, witness life’s struggles and debate our perception of how things ought to be. In these moments of despair, it is easy to succumb to the

darkness, to feel overwhelmed by the weight of our burdens. Fortunately, as our readings from scripture for today remind us, we have hope. Hope in our redemption through Jesus Christ. Hope and knowledge that God's love endures forever. It is indeed a love without end, Amen.

**To the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, both now
and forever, Amen.**