

Saturday: Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

The worst thing is never the last thing, Frederick Buechner reminds us. “The last, best thing,” he writes, “is the laughing deep in the hearts of the saints, sometimes our hearts even. Yes. You are terribly loved and forgiven. Yes. You are healed. All is well.” When Paul tells us we will all be changed, this is what he means. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, life and love will win out. Death has been swallowed up in victory, and the grave has lost its sting. This promise is the foundation of our faith, and the seed of our hope. Because of this promise, we know that tomorrow belongs to God, and that means we can live differently today. So “be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Prayer: Eternal God, remind me of your promise, so that I may live in hope, and without fear.

Sermon Notes



Series: Seeds

Sermon: While You Were Sleeping

Mark 4:26-29

Jesus also said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.’

Monday: Read Mark 2:1-12

Faith is a “big” word, not because it is long or hard to say, but because it covers a lot of ground; it has a number of different meanings, depending on who is using it and in what context. Faith can mean belief in Jesus, that he is the Christ, the son of the living God (the affirmation of faith we make when joining the church). Faith can mean trust — trust in God. Faith can mean relationship, an enduring connection with God in Christ. In addition to these meanings, I am fond of saying that faith is a way of seeing. Because of my faith in Jesus, I look at the world differently: when I walk outside, I don’t just see nature; I see creation. When I walk by people on the street, I don’t just see strangers and passersby; I see my neighbors, children of God, made in the image of God. Christians live in the same world that everybody else does, but we see it differently. Faith is a way of seeing. For some, seeing with the eyes of faith comes naturally, and because they see God in their lives and their world and their neighbors, they actively serve God by serving their world and their neighbors. For others, seeing with the eyes of faith may take a little work, but by leaning in and serving, perhaps in that process their eyes are opened and they begin to see. The paralytic’s four friends see with the eyes of faith, and so they are able to do whatever it takes to get their friend close to Jesus. They see a world of possibility and promise, and it is through that faith that Jesus brings healing. What does faith mean to you? What helps you to see with the eyes of faith? How can you look upon the world and see more fully what God is capable of?

Prayer: Eternal God, give me eyes to see you at work in our world, and in my life.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 18:1-15

When I think of Sarah laughing at God's promise, I'm reminded of that great line of Joni Mitchell's: "Laughing and crying, you know it's the same release." Somewhere mixed in with Sarah's doubt is the unspoken hope that God's promise might come true, the unshakable conviction that God is active among us, the impractical longing for new life. Somewhere mixed in with the frustration of this dream deferred is a faithfulness that never went away, a hope that endured, a love that did not let go. I hear Sarah asking herself the same questions we ask ourselves; How do we balance the practical demands of the world with the oh-so-impractical call of God? Do we remain in the safety of what we know or do we risk the unknown? Do we keep doing things the way we've always done them or do we take a step out in faith and hope and love? Do we trust that God's creative spirit is at work in us? Just like Sarah, God has promised new life to each of us...how will we respond?

Prayer: Holy God, open my heart to your gracious promise, and help me to live accordingly.

Wednesday: Read Mark 8:1-10

This is not an overly familiar story; we know the other story much better, the one where Jesus feeds 5,000 people on five loaves and two fish. It is the only miracle story in all four of the gospels. You undoubtedly remember the gist of it: The disciples thought the only way to take care of the hungry crowd was to send them away, but Jesus says, "You feed them," and the disciples' jaws hit the dirt. They didn't have enough money to buy food for 500 much less 5,000, and what little food they had in their packs was barely enough for the disciples themselves. But Jesus took the bread and he took the fish and the crowd was fed and satisfied. And yet, in Mark 8, we have a nearly identical situation. In fact, the situation calls for something slightly less miraculous. Jesus feeds fewer people – 4,000 instead of 5,000. And he does it with more food – seven loaves and a few fish instead of five loaves and two fish. Yet the same disciples who had witnessed the feeding of the 5,000 still have the exact same question they had the last time: "How do we feed these people out here in the desert? We just don't have enough..." Ultimately, it's a story about *trust*: Trust that God is God, trust that God is good, trust that God is at work in our lives, trust that Jesus really is exactly who he says he is, trust that God will provide what God promises, trust that the gifts God gives are enough to sustain us, trust that joy is found more in giving than anywhere else. It's a story about trust: a reminder that we've been down this road before, and that God is going to see us through to the other side. What helps remind you of God's power? Where in your life do you need to trust God more fully? In what ways can you put your trust in God into action?

Prayer: Loving God, you have promised to be with us no matter what. Help me to trust in you.

Thursday: Read Matthew 14:22-33

The disciples aren't really sure if it is Jesus they are seeing. They'd parted company the afternoon before. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, he sent the crowds away, and he sent the disciples across the sea, and he stayed by himself to pray. As the disciples crossed the sea in their boat a great storm came, and the winds and the waves were fierce, and they were almost overcome. But late that

night – or early the next morning, rather, about 3:00 AM – they saw something. At first they thought it was a ghost gliding across the water, for in these days it was common knowledge that the waters held demons below. They thought it was a ghost, and well, if it wasn't a ghost . . . they began to wonder what could be scarier than a ghost? They were scared to death, and they cried out in fear. And Jesus, walking towards them on the water, says, "Don't worry. It's me. It's OK." Peter just couldn't believe it, and so he blurts out, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Oh, Peter. His mouth always seems to work quicker than his brain. THIS is the question you ask Jesus? If it is you, make me come out there? Out on the sea, where the demons dwell below? Out on the sea, where the winds and the waves will beat me to death? Out on the sea, where nothing stands between me and 6,000 feet of water but the grace of God? If it is you, make me come out there, Peter says. It seems crazy, but maybe Peter knows the truth: You can't sit in the boat forever, because the safe place isn't on the boat. The safe place is on the sea, because that's where Jesus is. What are you doing to get next to Jesus? What will you have to risk? What makes it seem crazy?

Prayer: Holy God, help me to stay close to you, no matter how strong the storm.

Friday: Read John 20:24-31

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." That's what Thomas said. He missed out on Jesus' first appearance to the disciples. And his need to touch and see, to place his hands in the wounds, has gotten Thomas a bad rap over the years. "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Jesus asked. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." That sounds like a rebuke of Thomas, but I don't really think it is. There's nothing wrong with the desire to see, to touch, to know. But none of us, and very few of the readers of John's gospel, have had that opportunity. When John was writing, there were still a few eye-witnesses around, a few folks who had seen and known Jesus, but they were getting on in years. A child who was six years old on that first Easter morning would have been close to seventy by the time John wrote his gospel. No, what we're left with, what most all the followers of Jesus have ever been left with, is the story, the testimony, handed down from generation to generation. That testimony is all we have, all the world has, so it has to be enough. Jesus intrudes upon that locked room full of disciples to send them out of that room and into the world, to forgive sin, to tell the story of the risen Christ. Jesus sends the church into a world that has only our testimony to rely upon. No one else is going to have the opportunity to touch the wounds like Thomas. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon the church and sends them out to tell his story, so that all may know. How did you first learn the story of Jesus? Who was responsible for sharing it with you? How do you share the story with your words? With your actions? With your gifts?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to let your story shape my life, so that I may share your love with others.