

#34 15-16

Psalm 30

2 Kings 5:1-14

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Galatians 6:7-16

Stepping Out Into Newness

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Our scriptures today seem to be focusing on the idea of simplicity of faith. Naaman goes to Elisha to be healed of leprosy, and, being a little stuck in the mindset of “good only comes from struggle” Naaman resists the idea that he could be healed by Elisha because a.) he isn’t greeted with the fanfare that he has come to expect for a person of his rank; and b.) his task is too simple. Here is a man who has gotten so used to life being hard, his respect was earned through great effort ~ he cannot fathom a God who offers grace and healing simply and easily. How many men has he shown no mercy towards in battle? How hard is that for his soul to accept? And here is a God who can create life ~ create a change which he so longs for ~ and all he need do is bathe 7 times in the Jordan!?!?! What a total shock to all he has learned about life.

In our Gospel, Jesus sends 70 of his Disciples out to love people. He tells them not to plan, not pack, not to think too much about it ~ just go out and be with the people and love them and care for them! In doing so they learn total dependence and trust in the living God ~ and they came back telling of miracles! Then Jesus warns them not to get too heady - the miracles didn’t really happen because the Spirit submits itself to them - it happened because they were connected with the Holy - their focus was on trusting the Holy - and sometime that is harder to do from the comforts of your own home! Because there, we expect the environment to succumb to our desires. Whereas stepping out in the newness of faith, well, that creates a dependency on the God who is grander than all we know or could ever know!

And in this reading from Galatians, Paul is encouraging them to focus on working for the good of all, and to trust their relationship with Jesus, and a new life experience will come as a result of it.

Naaman, the Disciples, the Galatians, are all encouraged to not worry - think of good things, live to love and care for those around you, and a new creation - a new life will come.

Lately there have been a lot of articles and news reports on the question of whether people can change. There was an NPR program about work done in jails to help change the incarcerated. There was an article in Huffington Post about whether spouses change, or better yet, it was an article from a man about how his wife has changed, with the emphasis on how in relationships, if done right, everyone changes, and can grow. The idea of change and if it is possible and how is all over the place! Where would the publishing company be without books to help us to change our lives!?

And it seems it is an ancient desire - because the relationship with the Holy and our human weaknesses is the topic of practically every ancient wisdom writer on earth throughout history.

And this letter to Galatians is none the different. It is Paul, asking the congregation to step out into the newness that a relationship with God and God's people is forever calling us into. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit." In other words - what you look for is what you find! So if you are finding yourself thinking only about the problems of a situation, conversely, you can trust that you need to stop the way you are thinking, and begin to seek a trust in God for solutions and miracles!

What is on our horizon and a church and as a nation? We don't know . . . but we have some ideas, and we can follow the example of Jesus' 70 and walk into the future without fear. As Bruce Epperly writes, "Jesus sends his followers out with a simple message: live in the now, don't worry about success or failure, accept the generosity of others and let go of peoples' negative responses. The realm of God is won one moment at a time. When we live simply, focusing on what's really important, new creation emerges, and Satan, the powers of darkness, is defeated."

A poster I saw recently said, "worry is such a waste of imagination!" Our minds could be so free thinking up ways to listen more closely to God, to care for a friend in need, to practice trusting and living in the now . . . all kinds of things which take as much time and energy, and are more productive than worry.

I was reminded of the movie "Bridge of Spies" starring Tom Hanks. He played an historical figure, James Donovan, a lawyer asked to represent Rudolph Able, a Soviet spy. At least 3 times, as I recall, Donovan asked Able, "Aren't you worried?" and Able would respond with, "Would it help?"

And the truth is, worry *never* helps. In fact, worry hinders. Worry causes fears and doubt to creep into our lives and can block the trust in God which is awaiting to be put into practice. Worry takes up space in our thoughts and minds which can drown out the Holy Spirit from being heard. Worry does not help. It is like Naaman expecting things to be hard - when God is saying, "Grace abounds, my yoke is easy, my burden light."

But we don't want it easy - we don't want to let go of our control, we feel smarter more important if we expect everything to be in our control.

Again, Epperly: "These passages . . . counsel us to be faithful to the Truth that presents itself to us, reclaim simplicity of spirit, put commitment ahead of success, and awaken to life transforming possibilities right where you are. An omnipresent God doesn't need to be invoked; God's creative energy is right here and now. Dust off your sandals, jump in the river, and be cleansed and renewed."

We are being asked to keep our lives simple. Trust only in God - not in our past experiences, like Naaman - but in the present moment, seeking the truth of a loving, powerful God. Stay seeking, as those 70 who were sent out into the world to care for others, they discovered more about themselves and their abilities by being vulnerable and compassionate. And from Galatians, let us not forget this line in particular: "let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up."

We are stepping out every day in to the newness of life and of the Holy Spirit. Let us be of good faith, no worries, and we will reap what we sow!

Amen