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Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

October 2, 2016; the 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10.

Rekindling the Gift

How does one rekindle the gift of God, as our reading
from the Second Letter to Timothy encourages?

What is this gift of God that is within us?

Is it a gift of faith, which we hear the apostles ask for in
our reading from Luke?

“Increase our faith,” we hear them ask.

God’s love for us, for you, is so great.

And yet, at times churches, preachers, street preachers,
may have caused us to question...does Christianity
really present a loving God?

Well not everyone at all times has.

Even those well-meaning ones, who may have
encouraged us to “have more faith,” set up a
dynamic within which shame is easy to come by
as we wonder, “do I have enough faith?”

And perhaps, start to feel bad if we think we don’t.

Such advice, that seems more like a requirement, is all
the more damaging when it is give as an “if...then”
statement.

If you have faith, your wife, your husband, your child, your
friend, will be ok.

Those are the worse.

If someone were to say that to me today, it would take all
of my strength not to say something back in anger.

I would like to be able to say in a calm and loving way, “The God I believe in doesn’t work like that.”

God wants the best for everyone one all the time, and that doesn’t depend on my faith or your faith.

We see where it comes from--from today’s Gospel, “if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20)

Brian C. Taylor in his book *Becoming Human: Core Teachings of Jesus*, calls this “if...then” approach to understanding God’s love -- “perverted theology.”

And indeed it is.

I much prefer and agree with Taylor’s take on this passage: “this parable about the mustard seed tells us that even if your faith is tiny, even if it is weak (*and I would add, even if we are not sure we have any at all*), we should employ it....we should still use it to reach toward God.

For faith must be activated---we can’t wait for something to happen; we must employ whatever level of trust we have in God.”¹

Faith as reaching toward God...now that I like.

I often mention when we consider belief, and it is always a good time to say it again, that the words we have translated to get to “We believe...” in the Nicene Creed for example, is better translated as “to

¹ Brian C. Taylor, *Becoming Human: Core Teachings of Jesus*, Cambridge MA: Cowley, 2005, p. 188.

give your heart to.”²

Credal statements are one way of explaining mystery.

Today, we might use some different words, but I can give my heart to the intent and desire of those who created those statements to speak about the God of Love, who is always reaching toward us.

We are here today to reach for God...to give our hearts to God...this faith...this is belief...and it is much less of an idea, than an action...and through the action, we find God in action...we meet God...who can and does surprise us.

As in the Second Letter to Timothy, we are called to rekindle the gift, which “means to stir up the grace and faith and love that we have received, and we stir them up by putting them into practice.”³

And when we put our put into practice all that we give our heart to, we may be surprised by how God works with us.

If we had it all figured out, what fun would it be?

Our God is the Living God...God of surprises...God of grace and glory...grace freely given to us.

Taylor writes that it is in the “attempt” to trust that we meet God’s goodness...the attempt to have faith is all that matters.⁴

² Jenifer Gamber with Bill Lewellis, *Your Faith Your Life: An Invitation To The Episcopal Church*, Harrisburg PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2009, p. 73.

³ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol., 3*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., J. Peter Holmes, “Homiletical Perspective,” Loc 5351 of 12899.

⁴ Taylor, p. 189.

Today we are blessing animals and remembering St.
Francis of Assisi.

Born to a wealthy family, Francis felt that something was
missing but he knew not what.

All those who we remember as saints, and certainly St.
Francis, were people who reached toward God and
gave their heart to God by acting in loving,
peaceful, and often courageous ways in this
life.

They were not perfect.

They probably did not always feel like they had faith.

Certainly this is true of Mother Teresa, now an official
saint, who we know from her letters and papers,
worried about her faith...and often felt distant
from God. And yet, who had more faith than
she did?

St. Francis reached toward God in seeking God's will for
him in his life...praying in a church, he heard God
say to him, "rebuild my church."

At first he thought God meant that actual church...but
then Francis came to realize he was being called to a
particular life that would be characterized by
giving, and living for others...living in a certain harmony
with creation, such that he is
remembered for his communion
with animals.

St. Francis is also remembered for seeking peace in a
time when conflict between Christians and Muslim
existed.

St. Francis is reported to have crossed lines of battle to
offer a sign peace to his Muslim brothers.

As St. Francis did: Loving animals, loving and caring for creation, caring for our fellow human beings....all of this is reaching toward God...all of this is faith in action.

Whenever we are reaching toward God, we find that God
is reaching toward us.

Our stewardship theme for this year is "Walk in Love, as
Christ Loved us"

St. Francis walked in love.

In the way God that opened for him...called him to.

It does help God when we listen, open ourselves to the
movement of the Spirit.

It does help God to lead us when we take a first step by
walking in love...by being about and doing those
things that increase love, peace, justice, equality.

Spending time worrying about how much faith we have is
probably one of the Devil's favorite ways to distract us
from what God would have us think about.

And if you are not so comfortable with a personification of
evil, we can all probably agree that there are
destructive forces at work in the world that we
are called to address rather than worrying
about how much faith we have.

Our lives really are about stewardship...how we use our
time and resources...how do you, how do we as a
church do that for God?

How do we use our time, the gifts/talents, the money, to
reach toward God?

How do we walk in love as Christ loved us?

Good stuff to consider; thoughts to perhaps, if you like,

pray about with God...reflect prayerfully.

What you and I do with our time, our skills, and our money determines a lot...it determines who we can be for God as individuals and as the Church of the Holy Comforter.

This week, you will receive a letter from our Stewardship Ministry team, a letter that says much about who we are as church for God in this world...members and friends of Holy Comforter.

Please take time to read and pray with this letter.

We are walking in love; we are walking with God.

This is faith; this is faith in action.

How will God call us to walk together in the coming year?

Let us pray.

O God of life and love, thank you for the gift of St. Francis and for the gift of animals and all of creation. As we find our way, as we walk in love, help us to know, to have a sense of the work, the ministry, you are calling us to do, to be about...for the good of the creation, all creatures and all people.

Amen.