

Trinity Sunday, June, 19, 2011

Faith and Grace

Welcome to the first Sunday after Pentecost, a.k.a. Trinity Sunday. Well, we certainly have a lot to celebrate, don't we? As Paul reminds us in today's Epistle: we have the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and communion of the Holy Spirit-God in 3 persons-The Holy Trinity. And this Holy Trinity, this God in 3 persons, is a God whose love does not discriminate. In today's Gospel, Jesus instructs His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of All Nations." Not Just Israel, All Nations.

And why wouldn't He, they are all part of God's creation. After all, this Holy Trinity, this One True God would need to be completely true, wouldn't He? I'd be a little skeptical about worshipping a God who was partly true. The God I worship (and I think you do too) the one true God, The Holy Trinity, loves us All. Everybody's In. Nobody's Out. That's a God of Justice. Also, a God who gives us "free will." While we can never expect to pay God back for all we've been given, we Can choose to lead lives that follow the teachings of Jesus. We Can choose to love each other; and, not just other Episcopalians; not just people who love us; not just people we feel comfortable being around; but, also, the "marginalized." Perhaps, we can even learn (and this is a tough one) to love our enemies. And How, you might ask, can we hope to accomplish this? I believe the answer is through the Spirit of Christ (or Grace) in each of us.

It is by the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ that we are saved. And this grace (or spirit of Christ) dwells in us and give us faith. Fear is the enemy of faith and is one of the devil's favorite tools. I think it's what he uses to make it tough for us to love as Christ loved us. While loving as Christ did (and does) is probably not completely possible for us, we Can choose to take up the shield of faith that the Holy Spirit provides, resisting the negative energy of fear in its varying forms. By repeatedly exercising this gift of faith, I believe that it becomes easier and proportionately stronger. In direct response is the activation of Grace. So-then-grace begets faith which begets grace which begets faith in an ongoing continuum leading to an increasing manifestation of grace in us and how we live our lives. And, I think, this leads to an increasing desire and ability to follow the teachings of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but for me assaults of fear, in varying degrees, attempt to victimize me on a daily basis. Degrees of fear can range from negative thought to suspicion, dislike, jealousy, irritability, contempt; or, apprehension, anxiety, depression, to fear of the unknown or fear of death. The good news is that each time they attack they provide an opportunity to become stronger Christians. Against our shield of faith and armor of grace fear in whatever form has no choice but to retreat. Additionally comforting is the knowledge that God does not give us more than we can handle, and no amount of fear can ever separate us from the love of Christ or the Spirit of grace dwelling in us.

Hence, the power to ultimately defeat fear and love each other rests within us. All we need do is activate it.

As many of you know Susan and I were blessed with the opportunity to visit the Holy Land (Israel, and Jordan). It's difficult to swallow the fact that such sacred, Holy ground continues to be a land of injustice and oppression. The Israeli government seems to pursue a goal of driving out all "non-Jews" from what they believe to be their land without regard for the native Palestinians who include Muslims and Christians. It seems as though Israeli gunmen (police and military) who roam the streets are just waiting for a non-Jewish Palestinian to be driven to the edge, committing some offense that will allow the gunmen to shoot them down in cold blood. While Susan and I witnessed no such event first hand, we were told by Usama, our reliable, native, Christian, Palestinian guide that this sort of thing does occur. Certainly, the need for grace and love and the challenge to love one's neighbor (including enemy) abounds in the homeland of the "Prince of Peace." It was evident to Susan and I that our guide had come a long way in fostering the spirit of grace in himself, which has enabled him to live his life in Palestine without hate, and with love in his heart. He is a good example for other Palestinians to follow, and living proof that grace is more powerful than fear.

I hope you will all join Susan and I on July 9 at 5:30 in the parish hall for the Middle-Eastern Dinner where we will share our Holy Land experience first hand with pictures and Middle-Eastern items available for auction.

In this first Sunday after Pentecost Jesus has returned Home to the Father; but, as we heard in the lesson from Matthew, He is with us always, to the end of the age. Thus, He gives us the gift of the third person of the Trinity-

The Holy Spirit- who gives us faith and the peace of the grace of Christ. Let us continue to foster this most Holy gift leading to a greater ability to love each other and thereby love God.

Yes, we Do Have a lot to celebrate: The Kingdom of God is here and dwells in us.