

“David, Jesus and Paul”

In the name of God: the Father who made us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Spirit who gave us life. Amen.

The readings today are stories about three people, David, Jesus and Paul. They inspired a poem. Here it is.

David, Jesus and Paul,
Known men whom the Scriptures recall;
David, a king, God’s anointed to reign,
Jesus, God’s Son, salvation of all was his gain,
Paul, an apostle, overwhelmed by God’s call,
In a world that will never recall,
God’s gift of the Gospel for all.

God’s love for us all still endures
In the Spirit that brings the world’s cures.
Through powers like David’s that fail,
Jesus, the Christ, will prevail
Through the Spirit of power poured on us all
Giving life like the one given Paul.

The three lives revealed in the readings this morning are for me reflective of the journey God takes with us in the course of our lives. There is a constant tension between the way we chose to live and the way God guides and leads us. It is a healthy tension because our way leads to devastation and ruin and God’s way leads to life that never ends. The tension is God’s doing, the constant urging of the Holy Spirit to recognize the power of God at work in us through our own spirits, calling us to new life.

We see it in David. You may recall a few Sundays ago hearing the story of David being anointed king by Samuel long before king Saul was slain. When Saul was slain the people of Judah anointed David king, and seven years later, in today’s reading, all Israel anoints David king. For thirty-three years David reigned over a united Israel and built the city of David, Israel’s capital, Jerusalem, Zion, the Psalm calls the city. ***“And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.”***, today’s reading concludes.

When Samuel first anointed David at the home of his father Jesse, by God’s choosing, we are told, ***“the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David.”*** Yet we know that there were times in David’s life when he paid no attention to the Spirit of the Lord like the time when he indulged in adultery and murder to satisfy his own desires. After all he was king and the power was his. But God did not discard his anointed and sent the prophet Nathan to call him to repentance. Just as God did not give up on David God does not give up on us when we choose to disregard the Spirit that nips at our souls. We come to worship, not to show how good we are, but to acknowledge our helplessness before God and know God’s forgiving and restoring power in our lives freeing us from sin, death and the forces of evil.

That is because of the second man in our readings, Jesus. At his baptism the Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and he became the living breath of the Spirit in the world, bringing the kingdom of God among us. When he came to his hometown with his disciples and taught in the synagogue, the townspeople were offended. “Who does he think he is! He’s the carpenter’s son, the son of Mary, and his brothers James, Joses, Judas and Simon and his sisters are here with us.” They refused to believe the wisdom of his teaching and doubted he could do deeds of power. Jesus, amazed at their unbelief, made no move to prove himself, laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them, and left.

Jesus may have been regarded as the carpenter’s son in his hometown but Mark identifies him as the Son of God. Mark begins his gospel with the words, ***“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*** Jesus did just that, going about the villages teaching, sending his disciples out two by two, giving them authority over the unclean spirits, with nothing but a staff, sandals and a tunic. ***“So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out***

many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. It is this very power, the power inherent in the proclaiming of the good news, that is the reason for us being here today worshiping God. Because Jesus' townsfolk would not repent and turn from seeing him as 'the carpenter's son' and see him as God's Son they remained in unbelief, but the Scriptures indicate some of them later believed.

The key word here is 'repent'. It is God's gift and comes to us through the proclamation of the gospel. God's call to repent does not drive us to atone for our wrongs, rather it *"awakens a joyful obedience for a life according to God's will"* (Kittel IV p.1003). Jesus has done the atoning in his death and awakens us to a joyful life in his resurrection. We are freed by this grace of God, from sin, death and the power of the devil. Hallelujah!

Thus Martin Luther began with the first of 95 theses. *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent', he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."* Repent does not mean - feel sorry for one's sin - it means turn away from sin in the power of God's grace that awakens us to a joyful obedience for a life according to God's will. I find it significant that Luther said, "life of believers", and not life of the church. That means you and I. In all of history as I am coming to know it, humanity, the churches included, has been self serving. It is only the faithful presence of God in any age that has that has maintained faith, hope, and love in humankind. Those whom God has called and sent as witnesses with the call to 'repent' are, like Jesus, rejected.

That brings us to the third person in the readings today, Paul, and to that we could add our own name. (Paul and Robert). We and Paul live in the time after Jesus died and rose again. We join Paul when we declare in our communion liturgy, *"Christ has died, Christ is risen. Christ will come again"*. After his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus Paul was baptized. We too are baptized. We all know Paul was called and sent as apostle to the Gentiles.

As we experience the tension in our own lives between choosing to live our way and God's baptismal calling in our lives, we too are being called into discipleship. It took years for me to fully discern God's call into pastoral service. Are you discerning God's call in your life? Are you experiencing the healthy tension?

God's call to Paul took him into unknown territory. Before writing the words of today's reading Paul listed a litany of trials and sufferings he endured for the sake of the gospel. He will not boast about what he has gone through. He can only boast in his weakness because it was God's Power that saved him from the perils he encountered. He also had the blessed experience of knowing someone caught up in *"the third heaven"* glimpsing the glories of God. He can only boast for that person, not himself. Paul had an affliction, *"a thorn in the flesh"*, he called it. Three times he asked God to deliver him, but God's answer was. ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."*** Weakness will not be tolerated in the lives we choose to live, but in the life we have in Christ weakness is the invitation to the power of God in our living. We can spend all our lives making ourselves safe and secure, but in the end we die. The way of Christ is not safe and secure in this chaotic world, but it lasts forever.

Well, we started with three, David, Jesus, and Paul, and along the way included our own name. Is God's grace sufficient for us in the lives we are living? If it is our name will remain on the list. Amen