

Date: 23 August 2020

Time: 0930

Place: Papakura

Sunday of the year: Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: Courage and compassion

Lesson: Exodus 1: 8 – 2:10

Psalm: 124

Epistle: Romans 12: 1-8

Gospel: Matthew 16: 13 - 20

Healing I think has been a theme in my life – I always wanted to be a nurse, even though my father tried to steer me away from it – why? Because he, as a doctor, said that nurses are not acknowledged for their abilities and skills. I loved it, but God knew I needed to move on for healing for myself.

Today's readings speak to us in a progressive way I think and healing is a part of that. It is thanks to the subversion of the Hebrew women, who knew God, that the baby boys were allowed to live. It was thanks to Moses' mother's courage in keeping her son until he was 3 months old and then putting him in a basket – I cannot imagine how ghastly that must have been – she too trusted God was with her. Then her daughter had learned these skills from her mother and was able to suggest to the powerful Pharaoh's daughter that she could get one of the Hebrew women to feed the baby when she rescued Moses – it is interesting how she is NOT named – the powerful one is not named. Each of the women involved knew God and found a healing way for the future.

So how does this story relate to our new testament readings? I would argue that each of the women involved in the First Testament story knew who they were. Yes, they knew how to be subversive in order to achieve their goals. Compassion and courage was the basis of their decisions. In Paul's letter to the Romans, I hear that sense of compassion coming through - *"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."*

Thank goodness I do not have to live up to each of these gifts – Paul is reminding us that we are the body of Christ – we do it together.

But what of the disciples?
They are I think, still learning.

Each disciple had answered Jesus with others' opinions, not their own - John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

Perhaps Jesus was testing them. Perhaps they were fearful of stating their own fragile belief.

Peter was more definite:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

I wonder how Peter felt about that statement – I suspect he would have been stunned, and they were all told not to tell anyone – I would be immediately asking why not!

If we look at the faith journey of any saints, all of whom have gifted us in the Church with their understanding of who Jesus was and is – Paul, Francis, Ignatius all have taken time or a specific incident which leads to a commitment to the living Christ - Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Francis meeting with the leper whom in the past he would have avoided and Ignatius with the living God as he was recovering from an injury. If we reflect on our own fragile belief can we identify that which for us was a turning point – the one I remember is sharing communion with my sister who was very ill and I was mad with God – where are you? let June be healed or die, and from the midst of that God saying I want you to be a priest in my church! It took me another 14 years to respond!

Simon was not that slow. *Who do you say I am?* This was the second time in Matthew that Simon had proclaimed he knew who Jesus was, so unlike Mark it is not a turning point in the gospel – Simon knows who Jesus is and yet Matthew felt that it was necessary to have him declare this understanding again. Well we might ask why? Perhaps it is because Jesus knows that he still needs some help to fully appreciate who he is – these verses are sandwiched in the midst of the disciples being reminded to beware the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees and of Jesus death and resurrection, where Simon, now named Peter is compared to Satan when Jesus tells him to stop being a stumbling block to him and of the disciples' need to take up their cross and of self denial if they are to follow Jesus.

Peter being commissioned, the church is being commissioned.

The focus on the church's role is highlighted when Matthew speaks of the keys of the kingdom (16:19). The keys of the kingdom were traditionally held in the hands of interpreters of the tradition. Jesus is suggesting that there is to be a new body of scribes, who are to be inclusive. Binding and loosing refers both to binding and releasing interpretations of law (scripture) and their consequences. Later we hear where the local congregation is invested with the authority to deal with cases of discipline in the community. 18:15-18, so this church is not about a hierarchy – it is about all God's people being involved.

Our faith takes us into community where we have to have compassion and courage. We are human, we are not perfect, thank goodness, so we have to like Peter, sometimes pick ourselves up, forgive ourselves and each other and recognize that God is with us in the ups and downs of our faith and be faithful to our God in whom we know birth, life, death and the hope of resurrection.

We **are** living in a time when the church is in a funny place. We like Simon need to be able to answer strongly the question – Who do you say I am? You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and I would add in whom we live and breathe and have our being.

Peter, a fisherman was the one Jesus identified as the person upon whom he chose to build the Church because he was able to recognize the activity of God when he saw it. Paul also is able to do that when he tells us *'Be transformed so that you may discern what is the will of God'*.

I spoke of healing at the beginning of my sermon. We need to know who God in Christ through the Spirit is for us so that we can be transformed and healed. It often takes courage and compassion to do that. We are each of us here not only for ourselves but for another. May we hear this prayer:
God of liberation and freedom, we thank you for the people we have known whose courage reminds us that your compassion is present and at work in our world. Following their lead, may we resist systems and practices of domination, conforming only to the spirit of your justice. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.