

## ALWAYS ON THE GO

When it comes to our assigned readings, readings which all come from the same books of the Bible as last week, a lot has happened in just seven days. In the blink of an eyelash, we've gone from Point A to Point B or beyond. One gets the impression that the victories of faith, hope, and love can be incomplete; often leaving practitioners of faith, hope, and love in a place where it's always time to get on to the next thing. One also gets the impression that faith, hope, and love are in high demand. Let's take a look at our readings to get a greater sense of this.

In today's reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, one week after defeating Goliath and the Philistines with a sling shot and a stone, David now laments how the Philistines have risen up again; this time drawing real and costly blood by killing King Saul and his son Jonathan. "Oh, how the mighty have fallen," David says more than once today. Evidently, there really is something to the notion that the victories of faith, hope, and love are often incomplete; regularly leaving us with no choice but to get on to the next thing.

Moving on to our reading from Mark, here the issue isn't so much that the victories of faith, hope, and love are incomplete. It's that faith, hope, and love are in high demand; with demand often outpacing supply. One week after dealing with a storm, a sinking ship and the drowning faith of his disciples, Jesus is not on vacation or holiday as one might expect. Instead of a break or a breather, in our reading from Mark, Jesus goes from a scared father to a woman who has fallen through the cracks to a group of disciples who still don't know who he is to the scorn of those who believe death is the end to a dead girl who in her sleep waits for resurrection. I don't know how it can be made any clearer that the demand for more faith, hope, and love is never ending; demonstrating again that the Christian life is not for the fainthearted, the satisfied, or the lukewarm.

Turning now to our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, today, just one week after acknowledging that he and the congregation had grown apart through the use of heart wrenching language, St. Paul begins to ask the congregation for money. It's a stunning turn of events. It's not the apostle appeals to the congregation's generosity. Without a doubt, there's a place for this in life of the Church. Jesus has called us to be merciful, to be generous with our time, talent, and treasure, and the Church needs to provide opportunities for mercy and generosity to flex their muscles. But there's a time to provide these opportunities and a time to take up other topics instead.

The time to appeal to people's mercy and generosity is when things are going well; when levels of mutual affection and trust are high. And the bottom line is that things aren't going well when after speaking about a deficit in affection just two chapters earlier St. Paul begins to ask the Corinthians for money today. Evidently, faith, hope, and love are so much in demand that St. Paul can't wait for a better time to appeal to the Corinthians' mercy and generosity. Evidently, the victories of faith, hope, and love are often so incomplete that St. Paul has no choice but to press on to the next thing in his relationship with the Corinthians.

Now in actual fact, the story may be a little more complicated than this. There are those who think what is now 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians started out as two letters which were later clumsily made to be one letter. According to this theory, one letter took up St. Paul's frayed and fractured relationship with the congregation and the other asked the congregation for money after things had gotten better or before things had gone south. It's a theory which rescues St. Paul from having just about the worst sense of timing imaginable. It's a theory which rightly acknowledges the journey from the Bible's source material to its final form is a long and winding road. But

even if we accept all of this, the actual language of our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians still informs us that the Christian life is not for the fainthearted, the satisfied, or the lukewarm.

I mean St. Paul does start off today by saying the Corinthians have excelled in everything. But then, not being satisfied with what has evidently been a lot of excellence, St. Paul goes on to ask the Corinthians to excel in another generous undertaking. This is pedal to the metal. This is no rest for the weary. This is faith, hope, and love in great demand; with no real time for breaks or breathers. The question is: What are we to do with this?

For starters, I think it might be good for us to recognize the Christian life is as rugged and demanding as it's even been. Today more than one observer thinks our circumstances are as biblical as they've been in a long, long time. We're no longer in the majority. We're no longer upheld and sustained by the wider culture. Like David and his contemporaries once were, we're an upstart nation surrounded by Goliaths, Philistines, and other foes. Like St. Paul and the Corinthians, we're an upstart church which has no choice but to recognize the victories of faith, hope, and love can often be incomplete. From now until when the cows come home, and probably well after that as well, it's going to have to be pedal to the metal for us. We can't afford breaks in the merciful and generous use of our time, talent, and treasure. There's no room for breathers when it comes to inviting, welcoming, and including others into our fellowship and feeding them with rich spiritual food when they come. We live at a time when the demand for faith, hope, and love is as high as it's ever been. But it's one thing to recognize this reality and quite another to know what to do when we find ourselves fainthearted, too satisfied, or lukewarm. When this happens, it shall be time for us to say to Jesus, "Come and make us well" as a certain father does in our reading from Mark. When we're running on empty, it shall be time for us to lay hold of the hem of Jesus' garment as a bleeding woman also does in today's reading from Mark.

The fact is this is not the first time when the immediate future of God's people has been unclear. On the level of metaphor, at least, both of the women Jesus heals and saves today are stand-ins for a nation or a church which hasn't been producing the number of children the immediate future shall seemingly require. In one case, the normal break between blood and fertility has been interrupted for twelve years; making it impossible for any children to be conceived. In the other, death nearly deprives a young woman approaching the age of fertility from having the opportunity to become a mother herself. Apart from Jesus, these two women speak to a Church or a nation which has not been fruitful and therefore has not multiplied. But with Jesus this all changes. With Jesus both a younger woman and an older woman are able to conceive and bear children again. With Jesus the prospect of an immediate future worth having returns. This contrast of before Jesus and after Jesus remains as true today as when the gospel of Mark was first written. Remember! Scripture assures us Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Just this past week he brought another child into our life named Andrea Jane Adams. Making use of our God-given time, talent, and treasure, making use of our Spirit-enabled faith, hope, and love, making use of all the faithful ways we strive to invite, welcome, feed, and include, Jesus has got many more children, some young, some old, some in-between, on the way. Whenever we doubt it, whenever we grow weary, whenever we're tempted to be fainthearted, lukewarm, or too satisfied, Jesus will be there to strengthen us or reassure us whenever we reach out for the hem of his garment, thinking, praying, or saying, "Jesus, come make me well. Jesus, come make us well." Amen!