

March 12, 2017

Psalm 13
Lent II

The Freedom and Power to say NO!

RESIST is a big word right now. (I'm even wearing it!)

We are living in strange and uncertain times.

People talk of *fatigue*:

Compassion fatigue, current events fatigue, even resistance fatigue.

And isn't it interesting and timely

that the word and concept of *resist* shows up in our baptismal vows!

And perhaps now – in these times --

- *itis* a good to remind ourselves of our baptism vows.

That's right.. those words that your parents or you said and agreed to:

***Do you accept the freedom and Power God GIVES you
to RESIST Evil, Injustice, and Oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?***

Wow! That's not just a nice sweet ceremony,
coming of age, pie in the sky, or fire insurance...

It's a promise of activism!

A promise that we all will put ourselves on the line

when we see things that are wrong and unjust and not fair.

It's a promise that any of us at any age can do our part.

Baptism!

We are immersed in the life and spirit and ministry of Jesus..

taking up our cross and following him

into the hardest most fulfilling paths to live into the *Kingdom*..

the *Realm*.. the *Way of God* here on earth.

Annie Dillard wrote these words

and I think it should be above the church lobby door

when we all enter

to remind us what we Christians should be about:

*"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs,
sufficiently sensible of conditions.*

Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke?

Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

*The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets,
mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.*

*It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church;
we should all be wearing crash helmets!
Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;
they should lash us to our pews.
For the sleeping god may wake someday
and take offense,
or the waking god
may draw us out
to where we can never return. "*

Where do we find the strength to keep up the good fight of resistance
to the evil and injustice of our world...
or even to begin the fight
when so much seems against what we believe
to be right and true
and in God's Greater Good
for our human community?
Where do we go?

Where do we go
and how do we find our voice
when **commercial Christianity** sells its wares of power
and gain and judging the poor and vulnerable
instead of lifting up the God of the Bible..
the God of justice and compassion...
who over and over again
admonishes us to **resist** all of that ?

Our **Psalm 13** today reminds us
that our doubts and questions are part of our faith journey.
We cannot see the big picture that God sees,
but we can see the steps in front of us
that are right and true and just.

Like in this psalm, it's OK to question and beat our breasts
and wonder where God is in all of this.
We deal with a **big-picture God**
who amazingly works **through** us
to do those very hard things Jesus talked about.

Our baptism gives us our marching orders.
To be a committed Jesus follower
is not the easy life.
It is hard and uncompromising.
And is impossible to do alone.

That is why we have **community**:
to support each other, and have role models,
and reason together,
and search the **ancient** stories
for the **human** story
in which God is so very present all the time.

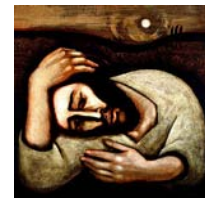
But make no mistake...
the anguish of the writer of this psalm
is not because he/she is navel-gazing.
It is not about his or her personal problems..
but the state of the world and society
and the Sisyphus endeavor
to live into the Kingdom of God
here on earth
(as we say each week in the Lord's Prayer).

It is not even **our** pain we are to rail against...
but the pain of those truly suffering:

- The refugees who spend an average wait of 20 years to get to safety ...
- The children whose bodies are sold for others' pleasure...
- Those who in the year 2017 still have no clean water to drink...
- Our climate which could be saved except for human greed...
- The families who are torn apart by laws w/o compassion
- The threat of war always hanging over our head which is a global problem...
- In our first world country of plenty, all those who now have no adequate health care...

How long O Lord? Where are you?

Jesus himself right after his baptism
was driven "by the Spirit"
out into the WILDERNESS to fast and pray.
After 40 days of not eating,
ha satan (the tempter) came to him
with three temptations.
Each time, Jesus **renounced**
the locus of power in the temptation of **self-serving**,
rather than in the **self-giving**.



In the early first-century church,
people actually had to verbally **renounce** the evil around them.
They had been part of one world,
and now they were entering another.

“By the 4th century,
the church had instituted a powerful symbol
of the transformation of candidates for baptism
away from evil and **toward** good.

Before going into the water,
they would face the direction of the West
(the direction of the setting sun)
and **renounce** evil.

Then they would turn away from that direction
to face the East (the direction of the rising sun)
as a sign that they were leaving the forces of evil behind
and facing the Light of God in their lives. “ (Marcia McFee)

Our baptism is a job description .. an identity ..
a promise for action with our whole lives and our bodies...
to do the work of justice and compassion.

I asked some amongst us where they saw evil and injustice in this world:

- *“In making our daily personal choices, and not acting for greater good: Human greed, indifference, putting one's own well being above that of others (Ex. eating pesticide-ridden foods, buying goods made in sweat shops, promoting dirty energy by "business as usual" habits like flying, driving gas guzzlers, banking with Wall Street gamblers, being passive when we know we must be active.)”*
- “I also see injustice in our country’s current stance on immigration, the current war on women’s rights (attack on Planned Parenthood, removal of coverage for maternal care and birth control), loosening standards for the environment, lack of equal pay for equal work, wage theft, criminalization of communities of color.. Homelessness. Hunger. Healthcare. Refugees. Poverty.”
- *“I'm afraid I see it coming from the highest offices in the land,(the president and Congress). Not stopping to figure out who will be hurt by an action, not acknowledging that hurt will result, or perhaps not caring..is evil. People will die if this health "care" act is passed, families will be split apart as a result of new immigration policies, we will be harmed by mining and chemical companies being allowed to dump poisonous waste in our waterways, our air will be further poisoned, Native Americans are once again being trampled, and all in the name of security that isn't secure (and the greedy desire for the rich to have more.”*



- I see evil injustice growing in our country and our world because of an emphasis on an "us vs. them" mentality instead of a focus on looking out for one another as all of God's children.

My lament is: Please God, bring us to a realization that we are all your children and help us to work together so everyone can experience your kingdom on earth.



To boldly live into our baptism vows does not mean success..
but it does mean **witness**.

Think of all those who have gone before us
in this faith.. what do we admire in and about them?
Not their success... not necessarily their achievements ..
(maybe there weren't any)..
but we look to their single minded devotion to God
and to God's love and compassion for all.

The proof of this Christian life pudding
is not that it looks pretty or will get compliments
or packed pews on Sunday.
The proof is in how we live out our baptism **mandate** every day:

***To love God with all we've got,
and to care for our neighbor as much as we care for ourselves.***

***To do justice, love kindness,
And walk humbly with our God.***

I give thanks for the witness of this church,
and the witness of each of you
who is our role model
of what it is to live into this baptismal vow!
You show us how it is done.
And God willing we will live into
being a model for someone else.
And so on and so on.

Success is not our measure.
Faithfulness is.

When we encourage each other,
and others see us struggle mightily and steadily
towards what is truly right, it makes a difference..
it plants a seed .. it grows the kingdom.

And that witness is:

Working for the best for the least;
that witness is welcoming community to all;
that witness is our faithful intelligence and struggle with what we believe
(not settling for what we're told to believe);
that witness is an awe in the Mystery of the Holy (and)
that witness is the Love that undergirds everything we do.

And then.. .in spite of and because of
and in the midst of
doubt and lament,
we can say with the ancients:

God is good all the time.
All the time God is good.

Amen.