

Sunday, September 25 2016

Jeremiah 32:1-3, 6-15

I Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

Trusting and Hoping

One day this past week while driving to the university I had a wonderful encounter with a family of Canada geese. As I was driving down one of the busiest streets around 8 in the morning, my passenger (Collin) and I noticed that the traffic which was heavy in both directions had stopped moving. When we reached the area where we could see what was happening it was a delightful scene. There was a family of Canada geese crossing the road. They were trusting the cars to all stop and let them go. First was the large female and then several young geese, looking like the adults but not full size, crossed directly in a straight line. Meanwhile the street was getting busier with cars now backing up towards other streets in both directions. Foot traffic on the sidewalk in the direction of where the geese were heading had also picked up. But meanwhile the last goose was still on the sidewalk near us. Here he was eating a few blades of grass when he turned and noticed that the people on the sidewalk had not stopped for his family. Then all of a sudden this goose who was eating grass, started flapping his wings, honking aloud and walked into the street following the other geese into the lawn across the road. These geese truly trusted the traffic to stop on the road in both directions and the pedestrians as well. For a few short moments there was only the honking of the one goose and then after he made it to the other side, the traffic started to move again. This goose trusted us to stop to let the family through? How often do we even think about trusting another person?

Today's readings focus on two very important aspects of how we should be living our lives as Christians. Trusting Christ now as we live day to day and hoping that our faith will enable us to live fully a life that is true when we will lay up treasure for the coming age or when we are called to our heavenly home.

We heard the story of how Jeremiah bought land at Anathoth and how he asked that all the sealed and unsealed documents be put in a clay jar for safekeeping. Jeremiah we recall is a prophet who said that the word of God came to him to make this purchase because houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in the land of Judah. Jeremiah was the nearest relative

to Hanamel who wanted to sell the property. Jeremiah buys the property as a sign of trust. He trusted God that things would get better and in the midst of the devastation which had occurred in Judah, Jeremiah found hope. Jeremiah trusted that things would get better with God's help and the future was unknown. Jeremiah trusted the word of God which came to him and had hope which would enable him to carry on because the world was not ending, but merely changing.

We read or hear the news every day. Sometimes we wonder about the future because of terrorism, racism, global warming, terrible shootings, economic instability, wars and destruction, yet we must look around in God's creation and see signs of hope. That geese family will soon be flying south to warmer climate. But, first, they had to cross that road safely. We are a society built on trust—we trust that the food and medicine we consume will be safe because of government inspections and protocols. We trust our automobiles to keep us safe as we move about and we trust that if we have hope that life can be and will be good. Trust and hope. One is the foundation upon which we share and grow and the other leads us to move beyond who we are now and gives us something and somewhere to focus.

Having hope sustains us so that we can make real changes in our world. Life does continue even when we might not feel very hopeful at this moment. Maybe you are grieving the death of a loved one in recent days, or remembering back to when life was different, not necessarily better, but different. Maybe you are not feeling as best as you would like to in this moment as you have had recent surgery or change in medications or a series of problems stemming from one cause. You have trusted others to care for you physical health and now you are wondering about what tomorrow will bring. You are unsure of having hope in anything or at all.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he charges him to take hold of the eternal life to which he was called when he confessed Christ as Saviour. He charges him to keep the command that God gives life and proclaim Christ is the king of kings. Paul also tells Timothy to command the rich of this world to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share. They are not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth, but to put their hope in God who

provides everything for our enjoyment. Paul continues this letter by stating that Timothy is to guard what has been entrusted to your care and know that God's grace is with him.

Trust and hope. Even the rich are not live with false expectations that money will get them everything but they are to put their hope in God who provides everything for them. How difficult this must be when many people who are rich do not even trust those whom they pay to look after their wealth- whether it is in the bank or in real estate or business. Again we see the parallel of trusting and hoping.

In Northern Ontario there are many beautiful lakes but there was one that was known in the area for its very clear water. It was the place where animals and people gathered and enjoyed the natural beauty of the water and its surroundings. But after a while it was covered with green scum and no longer was the water fresh and clear. Even the farm close by had to find a new water source for the livestock. Finally someone came by the lake who understood the problem. Debris had collected from the hard spring rains and had stopped up the pathway of the free flow of water and prevented the water, not into the lake, but out of the lake. This spillway was cleared, and soon the lake was fresh and clean again. The flow in and out of the lake was necessary to keep the water pure!

The blessings of life flow to you and I, but sometimes we fail to realize that they are to flow through us for others to experience and especially for those in need. Such is the story of the rich man who didn't keep things flowing in his life he had been blessed with riches, but did not let the riches pass through him. He did not trust or have hope beyond his life and the result was that his life became clogged.

Jesus is teaching the crowds who have gathered including the Pharisees whom we have learned love money. To further emphasize trust and hope, Jesus shares the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The parable is about a rich man who is dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. He had come from a wealthy and large family and many blessings had flowed into his life, many of which he was not aware. At the gate near the rich man's home was a poor beggar man named Lazarus who was crippled and covered with sores, dogs were able to lick his wounds because he could not get away from them. He begged in order to survive and longed to eat even table scraps from the table of the rich man. The two men were acquainted because of where they lived, but nothing else.

One day, the beggar died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried in hell where he was in torment. When the rich man looked up, he saw Abraham far away and beside him was the beggar. He called to Abraham and asked for pity and he asked that he would send Lazarus to bring him a quenching morsel of water as he was in agony. But Abraham replied—in your life you received good things while Lazarus did not; he is comforted here and you are in agony. He cannot go to you because of this divide which exists between us.

The rich man realizes what has happened and now begs Abraham to send Lazarus to save his 5 brothers from the torment he is experiencing. Abraham denies this because they have Moses and the Prophets—they need only to listen to them. But the rich man states no, someone from the dead needs to go to them so that they may change their lives. But Abraham tells the rich man, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not even be convinced if someone rises from the dead. Of course Jesus is referring to what will take place later on!

This parable teaches us about the lack of compassionate care in our world today. The unnamed rich man probably never acknowledged poor Lazarus on the street when they were both alive. But now that they are both dead he wants Lazarus to comfort him with water, to tell his brothers of the torment he is enduring and to get them to listen to Moses and the prophets. He wants Lazarus to maintain the poor man status he had on earth, but Abraham tells him that Lazarus is now experiencing his life eternal with God, and that he need not fulfil the rich man's commands because while alive, he had hope beyond the life of a poor beggar. Lazarus had trusted in God because of the message of Moses and the prophets and is now in the presence of God and all those who went before him including Abraham.

The rich man lived his life in earthly wealth and luxury and paid no attention to the teachings of Moses and the prophets and of the messiah to come. He did not know that there would be a great divide and he trusted only in himself. The blessings he received in his life never left him; he was not generous with the gifts he had received and he did not do good deeds. He lived for himself. But when he died he was in agony.

Through Paul's charge to Timothy and in hearing Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus we learn of the need to receive blessings from God and how important it is to pass on these blessings with a generous spirit. This is so that when you are seeking help or assistance you know that you can trust God to see you through anything. This is so that you can have hope in this life and to know for certainty that you will live eternally with God, Abraham, Moses and Lazarus and all those who had faith and believed. Timothy was to tell his listeners to do good, to be rich only in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share.

The rich man is not named, but he is also not condemned for being rich. He is condemned for his indifference and uncaring attitude towards the poor man Lazarus right outside his door. We need to also remember that Abraham was wealthy—he had many descendents and livestock, and land which reached as far as he could see. Yet, he isn't in the place of torment- he is in heaven. The difference is how he passed on his blessings.

You have been blessed—are you passing on these blessings from of God by sharing the message to trust and hope in God. Or are you acting like the debris which lead the lake to turn green. Only you can change this through Christ Jesus. Only you can ask God to give you a generous spirit for the blessings you already have. All God asks is that you put your trust and hope in him.