

Sunday, October 30, 2022 Pentecost 21 ***“Growing Abundantly in Faith”***

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Have you ever thought about what you have around your home in this moment. You probably have similar things to other people—like stove, fridge, washer and dryer; bed, cupboards with linens, foods, medicines, closets with clothes for various seasons. Do you have some of different things-is good or do you have an abundance of one thing? Or maybe the question to ask is simply: Do you have too much or even too much of a good thing? Or do you have much at all?

How do we know? Some movies or programs show people needing to get something out of the closet in a rush for whatever reason. They look for a specific item but what occurs? Everything falls out and there is just too much stuff all over the floor. What happens next? Sometimes all is stuffed back into the closet until the next time something is needed. Or, it is decided that too much is just too much and the result is purging- recycling, throwing away and rediscovering something you forgot you had!

Since Jesus first asked the disciples who he was and they responded the Messiah people have tried to figure out their purpose. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to die and rise again for the sake of others in need of reconciliation with God. But for all who have followed Jesus including the first disciples we tend to wonder what is our.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he shared how to pray and the words we call the Lord’s Prayer. And from that time on, these disciples told their story to others in light of Jesus death and resurrection. After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, generations of people have come to believe and trust in Him. And through all this time, people have also been searching for their purpose as Christians. For years, people have been reflecting, reading, praying and serving Jesus but the teaching of the Messiah which calls us to follow is found in the words of the father of a boy who had a demon.

In Mark 9 :21-27, Jesus sees a boy with a spirit which causes him to convulse, fall to the ground and foam at the mouth. Jesus asks his father how long he has been this way. He tells

Jesus that this boy has had this since childhood and how this demon has affected the boy. "IT casts him into the fire, and also water and tries to destroy him. But if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help him." Jesus' response is "If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes"! The father CRIES out "I believe, help my unbelief."

Maybe this is what we need to do—cry out to God and say these same words—I believe, help my unbelief; help me to grow in faith and to have life more abundantly.

As Christians we might wonder and wander from our life's journey as disciples of Jesus. Sometimes we might even forget our purpose. What is the meaning and purpose of the Christian life? The old catechism teachings tells us that our chief purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. We were created for God's glory and are to proclaim his praise but the worship we share must come from our hearts. It must be an expression of our real feelings and thoughts. To get to this point is because God touches your heart; His Spirit moves in to those who hearts are open and willing to receive Him. And it is then people repent and experience love and grace. And this is living a Christ filled life.

Our goal is to become more like Christ and to live life, but not merely as existing day to day, or for many today- paycheque to paycheque, but abundantly transformed and changed from the inside out. We are to be like him "in true righteousness and holiness." In our behavior and in our devotion to God, we are to be like Jesus Christ. To live the Christian life we need: right beliefs- through the renewing of our minds; right actions- praising God but sharing empathy for those in need; and right emotions- loving others with Christ's love. If the heart is right and our beliefs are right, then right behavior will be the result. We want an abundant life, yes but we need to help one another grow toward our goals as Christians.

The Pharisee and the tax collector were both living according to their faith teaching- going into the temple and praying. The Pharisee was loud and expressing his thoughts about how good he is compared to others. The tax collector knew of his sins and confessed them anyway but did so in a humble manner. As we worship God who are we most like? Boasting about how good we are in comparison to others, or being humble and seeking forgiveness from God when needed?

Habakkuk asks “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?” Maybe we need to turn the question around for what is happening in our world today. Is God crying for our help in mending and tending the needs of the earth and its people? Are we paying attention? Are we listening? And are we willing to humble ourselves and seek forgiveness as we put into action changes that bring healing and transformation? How is your faith when it comes time to action? How might your unbelief diminish and your faith grow stronger?

Paul writes this second letter to the church at Thessalonica as a letter of thanksgiving and encouragement for what they have endured and how through it all their faith is growing. This is evident to Paul because he has received good words about this church and how they are sharing their love not just to some, but everyone. Paul thanks them and boasts about them to others for they are living out Christ’s love as a church that is steadfast and faithful.

Paul tells this church family that he is pray for them by asking God to make them worthy of his call so that what they do is faithful. It is Paul’s prayer that in all that they do, Jesus will be glorified according to God’s grace. The reason he says this is because when Jesus returns, he wants to be sure that these believers have grown in their faith and truly love Christ Jesus as Saviour.

How faith-filled are you? How do you know? Some of you might say- it depends upon the day. When you are questioning your faith, there might be anger to God over what has occurred that has left you angry, afraid, alone or crying out in need. And you think that God is not there and your faith is lost. There might be other days when you see the Spirit of God moving people around you to do something you did not think possible—sitting talking to strangers, finding out about their life and offering opportunities to make connections. Or you see others and what helping others does for one’s heart and mind- and how people care.

TO grow in faith we need to pray, read the Bible—the teachings of Jesus, his life story and prophecies and history of people, to understand how God never leaves. And how throughout history, God’s promises are fulfilled. All God calls us to do—believe in Him, open your heart and grow. One’s faith does not grow like a seed in 90 days to harvest; there are

times when our faith grows because of what we face—losses, celebrations, loneliness or even searching and seeking for ourselves what is missing.

But our faith like a seed needs nurturing- food and water; the Spirit and wisdom of God's teachings in our hearts and we come to know His message for us all. As we worship and glorify God, as we read His word to us, and as we share in faith with each other not just as casual acquaintances, but as brothers and sisters in Jesus who care about others, our faith in God will continue to grow and our purpose will be made clear. This is our prayer of hope for one another as we strive to work and worship in Christ's name.

Let us pray

God of grace and love we praise you for you love us and call us to serve you. Show us the depth of your love as we may struggle from time to time to know what is right for us to do in this post Christian, post pandemic world. As we seek your Spirit to move us, help us to discern your will and guide us in all our actions we pray. Hear us O God we pray for to know you God is to love. Amen.