

Faith in God's faithfulness to us: Life

I recently watched a video and the speaker was saying that even the best person, who loves all and is willing to help so many will stop if they are continually let down by another.

Some people we may know make it difficult to be there for them. They accept invitations and then cancel at the last minute repeatedly. They say they want to hang out, but they find other things to do; they accept help from others, but giving that help back... and after a while it gets exhausting. So we stop extending invitations, we don't give the time as we done previously. It is not that it is a quid pro quo we want, but a little respect, a little fidelity. Nobody likes to feel taken for granted.

Years ago during my internship at Stanford hospital as a seminarian, I was called to a room (I have shared this story before, but I find it powerful). A mother was there with her young daughter and the mother was very very upset. I listened to her, and she revealed that they had recently been baptized as Christians (not Catholic though) and the minister had assured her that once baptized nothing bad would happen. Yet there they were in the hospital with an ill daughter. The mother was confused, angry, scared...

I was taught there are four basic emotions: happiness, Anger, Sadness and fear. Happiness is when all is good for us. Anger is our emotion when an expectation is not met. Sadness is our emotion when we perceive a loss. Fear when we perceive a threat to ourselves or to something/someone we hold as important.

Over the years I have also listened to people express anger, sadness and fear about God. God was not present. God did not answer their prayers. God did not do what they wanted despite them doing what they thought God wanted. They did not get what they thought they deserved. Their lives were a mess, it must be gods fault

And, sometimes too that person I listened to was myself.

Faith means to trust, to hope in God. Faith is to believe that God is at work in our world. We give faith to God's faithfulness towards us.

The Israelites/Hebrew people struggled with this. As we go through the Old Testament God calls out to his people and says "I am here." and "Follow my ways to find peace." And the people respond and then fall away. They tended to put their trust in the ways of the world, in their form of politics, in their military strength, in their walled cities, in their own machinations, into false idols. And as those ways collapsed, they cried out to God "Why did you abandon us?"

The Book of Job from the Wisdom Literature brings this home in such a poignant way. Written some 500 years before Jesus it dramatizes Israel's apparent struggles with God and seeks to understand why bad things happen to them. And God has the final word in Job; that God's ways are beyond anything we humans can imagine. We see at the end Job is restored as well. We as Christians would see this as a reference to Resurrection.

Jesus trusted in the Father. His whole ministry and life was one act of faith after another; to reveal God's fidelity to humanity, to reveal the power of God and to reveal our own humility in the face of it. Jesus reveals that faith brings life!

Jesus' faith is why he sleeps amid the storm, he is confident in God's care; also prefigurement of the sleep of death he will enter into eventually. And he awakes, calms the storm, revealing his union with God. And he also chides his disciples for their own lack of trust.

We all have expectations of God, of this world, of others. Our egos will demand that those expectations be met; that all go according to our plans, to our ways, to our own ideas and desires.

I think God says "if you want to try to control everything, then go for it; try it. See what you get." And we do, and we mess up.

Yet, God stays with us. God remains faithful to us even if we get weak in our faith. God remains present and ready to jump back in and show us how.

It does not mean that life will always be rosy and easy. It won't. Even the beloved Son endured hardship, suffering, pain, and so will we. Yet as the Son, when we trust, as we walk forward we find a calm amid the storm. We find a way through that will often surprise us afterwards.

And maybe the best part is that we don't have to beg God for it, or earn it by our prayers, devotions or actions. God helps because that is God's fidelity to us. It is God's very nature to love. God simply waits for an opening.

The sacrament of God's faithfulness is our Eucharist. Nothing we do here, or I do as priest, makes this happen. It is all about trusting that God's love in the Spirit comes down upon the bread and wine, and they become the very person of the beloved Son. Given to us to eat and drink; given to us to live, to strengthen us, to humble us, to awaken us.

We all know this life will be difficult; we will be disappointed, heartbroken, angry, betrayed, scared. I wish it were not so, but...

Our choice as disciples of Jesus is to go forward in hope, in trust, in faith. It means that even if all seems overwhelming, dark, and/or confusing we can find a way through.

Have faith.