

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 18th 2017

Feast of Saint Luke, Evangelist

After reflecting on today's readings several different times, I found three morsels upon which to chew for a while – Paul's lament, the psalm's joyful expression, and the gospel's guide to living our lives with faith.

First Paul – he doesn't seem terribly pleased with how his friends and allies have been supporting him in his time of need. He feels deserted, and alone, but realizes that God still stands with him, and that this is enough. He also asks that his colleagues' abandonment of him not be held against them. I find it easy to relate to Paul's feeling of abandonment. I think there are times in all our lives where friends, work colleagues, and even family, seem to abandon us when we need them. I also think it is easy for us to overlook the strength we can derive from knowing God is there to support us. I think where some people fall down here is in expecting God to make it all good, to "fix it" and to give us what we think we want, instead of seeing that God really is there to give us clarity, and help us to understand how what we have experienced can bring us closer to God. I also think Paul's forgiveness of those who have deserted him is noble, and hard for us to do in practice. Just think of times in your own life where a colleague at work has really hurt you – have you really forgiven that person for the harm they caused?

I found the first verse from the psalm to be helpful – "Let ALL [my emphasis] your works give you thanks, O, Lord and let your faithful ones bless you." Why do I emphasize "all"? I think this verse resonates with the Ignatian spirituality of finding God in all things. All God's works include we humans, of course, but they also include the birds and trees and rocks and seas and mountains. How then do ALL the works give thanks? By just being – birds sing sweetly, trees sway in the breeze (and drop their leaves – a challenge this time of year where I live), rocks and seas and mountains serve as (almost) permanent reminders of God's gift of creation. How then do the faithful ones bless God? Not just by existing (like rocks and trees) but by discovering their purpose, by holding firm in what they are called to do, in Hopkins words [from "As kingfishers catch fire"] by acting "in God's eye what in God's eye he is – Christ." The faithful ones bless God by going out and living as God calls them to live, by acting as Christ in the "ten thousand places" where Christ lives, by striving to be the just man who "justices."

So then to the gospel – Christ sends the disciples out as the advance team to prepare the way for the Lord who is to come. Clearly these people are faithful ones, and they are blessing God by their journeying in behalf of Jesus. What struck me as I read this passage is the simplicity of their preparations. I served six years in the US Army Reserves in the early 1970s and I was assigned to a headquarters company that coordinated logistical support for the equivalent of an army theater group (such as Europe in WWII). Our training consisted of planning (should we ever be activated) for transportation, food, shelter, clothing, etc. for the soldiers in the group. We prepared scores of binders containing plans and contingencies for the creature needs of our soldiers. My wife and I have taken our three children (when they were younger) on vacations, trips that involved significant advance planning for campgrounds or motels, clothes to pack, games to play in the car and so on. So when Jesus tells the disciples to "carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals" I am in awe of the faith that it took (and takes for those receive this call today) to respond "yes I will" and to leave on this journey.

Leaving on the journey as Jesus calls us to do is irrational, and thus the essence of an expression of faith, for we must set aside what we know and rely on the grace of God to provide what we will need.

And so my prayer today is for the grace to truly forgive those who abandon me, to live my life as God calls me to, and to have the faith to journey in simplicity with Christ to the ten thousand places where He resides.

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