

Faith hope charity and other things hoped for
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
August 11,2019

Blessed be God who animates our lives and in whose service is perfect freedom. AMEN

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Our faith is being tested mightily these days...and what is worse, I have said that too many times...

Last week two more mass shootings.

this week anger, fear, frustration, grief, pain, and prayer fill every media opportunity

Rhetoric is at once prophetic, compassionate and hateful and arrogant

One soccer player earlier this week grabbed the microphone after scoring a terrific goal to simply scream Congress end gun violence!

I wonder if I would have the courage

we teeter on the edge of the gap between prayer and action which seems to be widening

even before praying this week's lectionary God sent the words of Hebrews 11:1 into my heart: It has become a mantra: Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.

I have been praying this Scripture and revolving images of faith and hope around a sphere which is already crowded with fears and worries.

It seems to me that I have stood here too many times saying: has our faith ever been more greatly tested? where is the hope?

And yet it is times like this, albeit too many of them, which call us back to the center which is God, the creator, the lover, the redeemer.

I believe it is no coincidence then that this week's lectionary is hinged on the letter to the Hebrews definition of faith and its light of hope. I believe it is no coincidence then that the How of Luke this week is How to live into the second coming of Christ! How to keep faith in and prioritize things heavenly. I believe it is no coincidence that faith and hope are coupled with a warning to stay awake...after all we are threatened with numbness and narcolepsy. I believe it is no coincidence that we are intended to gaze into the horizon of hope which offers the extraordinary salvation from the ordinary seeds planted today, even if we don't live to see them to fruition.

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It is also no coincidence that after last week's story of the Rich Fool we are still considering what the difference between being foolish toward God and being wise might be.

During the Holocaust Dietrich Bonhoeffer sat in prison writing letters of faith and hope in the face of dire circumstances.

He explained in one of those letters that foolishness is different from evil. evil can be confronted. foolishness is slithery and almost impossible to control or change. Fools are products of society and culture, not personal psychology. To address foolish, albeit tragic, behavior one must understand its roots, not just its results. This understanding which also means dismantling complex social systems is the only way to stop foolish behavior such as building bigger barns or in Germany killing masses of Jews or in today's world gun violence.

This cultivation of understanding is Wisdom and wisdom calls us to liberation...we are free to be fully God's Fully love when we fail to succumb to social values only and foolishly, we are unencumbered

The opposite of foolishness Bonhoeffer notes is not mental acuity or problem solving it is wisdom and LIBERATION.

You see a fool to God is one who does not believe. No faith, no hope. Success must be seen and felt immediately. A fool then derives one's sense of security from self and idols, never acknowledging a higher power!

We learned last week that a fool cannot get out of the ego and everything is about I me mine.

Fatih in God moves us to we us ours.

this gun violence which keeps threatening our lives and security is certainly evil but it is also a slimy foolishness which we simply cannot seem to capture! And that may be because of our society which rewards the power, the might the terror and the violence or at least doesn't seem to dig deep enough to change it.

all liberation theology (which is really all theology) points us to the ultimate freedom known only in a perfected life in God, in complete salvation. We are in the process, knowing God imperfectly on earth but having faith in and hope for that time when we know God face to face which is to say perfectly.

many of the actions of fools are instigated by fear.

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actions of faith are instigated by the hope of fullest freedom....in God.

Fool

the consistent theme in Luke of heavenly things and awareness both characteristics of a wisdom not foolishness this is the way to liberation, this is the way to salvation.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

You will note that after the definition of faith the writer of Hebrews goes on to offer a litany of freedoms achieved by simply following God's command. Doing God's will. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, God turned barrenness into fertility, rescued the captives, brought the exiles out of bondage, provided sanctuary from the wilderness.

All things unseen, yet hoped for.

The motivation was faith, not reward...the rewards were great and grace!

A litany is a form of prayer, an invocation to God to bless a list; of grievances, of sorrows, of laments, of life histories, of deaths, of prayers part of our Eucharistic Prayer each week is a litany of salvation history not unlike that in Hebrews. We give thanks to the saving grace of God known since creation in the lives of....

these are stories of people who did not expect a particular return or result, unlike the fool, these are stories of people who simply said yes to God and by doing so experienced a liberation like no other! a baby to the barren, a rescue to the lost, ...

A litany calls for a communal response. A litany calls us to pay attention to get outside ourselves and our personal lists.

So I end this sermon with renewed faith and hope even in the face of tragedy. I invite you to allow the words of Hebrews to rekindle your faith and hope in things unseen and to erase the numbness and futility that we might be awake with Christ! And I end it with a litany of those killed in the wake of gun violence to which I invite you to respond with the refrain: May Light Perpetual Shine Upon them.. and I wrap all this up with one our faith tradition's most powerful and eloquent collects.

To the victims of the gun violence in El Paso, Grant them eternal rest

To the Victims of the gun violence in Dayton Ohio. Grant them eternal rest

Let us pray:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son; Look with compassion on the whole human family, take away the arrogance and hatred which inject our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen