

God works through our daily faithfulness

Sermon preached at the Church of St. Peter & St. Paul, Marietta, GA
by The Rev. Thomas C. Pumphrey, October 2, 2016
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (year C, proper 22):
Lamentations 1:1-6; 3:19-26; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

The heroes of our day are those whose achievements stand out above the crowd. The heroic stories we tell are about amazing accomplishments against all odds. We celebrate great achievements in sports or politics or business or medicine or public service. And we should celebrate these unique experiences. We should especially thank God for working in and through our heroes to accomplish these achievements.

We look to our heroes, and in our own lives, we often want to see big accomplishments and big achievements in our work, our families, in church and elsewhere. Sometimes we do find the gift of those accomplishments. However, our scripture readings today remind us of the less sensational but perhaps more important achievements of daily discipline and daily faithfulness to God. Often, the biggest difference comes in small but consistent faithfulness day by day. For God works powerfully through our daily faithfulness.

Today we have an unusual collection of scripture readings, and I would like to touch on each of them, especially Paul's second letter to Timothy. In each case we see the power of God doing great things through our daily faithfulness.

Jesus warns us not to take pride in our good works—not to boast of what we've done for God. After all, we are God's servants. *God* is the one who is accomplishing things through us as we are obedient to God. Our part may even be small, like faith the size of a mustard seed. But God can do great things through our daily faithfulness, our daily obedience to God. Through that daily faithfulness, we leave a legacy of God's blessings.

We have two readings from Lamentations today. Lamentations is an Old Testament book of Hebrew poetry lamenting the downfall of Jerusalem, the holy city. Earlier this summer and fall, we've heard the prophets warn the people of Israel and Judah to turn back to God and be faithful in their daily lives—not just in their temple sacrifices. Lamentations grieves the results of the people's persistent disobedience. Yet, Lamentations also speaks of hope. Babylon came and destroyed Jerusalem and the great Temple. But the people still find hope in the steadfast love of God for his people, and his mercies that are new every morning.

In the years that followed, the people of Judah returned to the Lord and practiced daily faithfulness to him. As the years went by, God shaped them into a people again through their daily faithfulness. They may have lost the glory of the Temple when it was destroyed, but they regained the presence of God in their lives as they sought him out each day, one day at a time.

What does that daily faithfulness look like? Our faithful living with God starts with regular worship of God, forming the foundation of our daily prayer. Daily faithfulness involves seeking God in prayer each day as part of the rhythm of your life. Daily faithfulness involves regular study of the Bible, and regularly serving Christ in the world. Daily faithfulness looks like ordering our priorities around God's priorities instead of what is popular in the world. Each day, we can measure the values of the world around us against the standard of God's values. Immersed in the Bible, we can learn to see ourselves and the world through God's eyes, and respond as God wants us to respond.

Let me share with you a story about what God can do through our daily faithfulness. It's not a story of amazing achievement. Rather it is a look back to see what came from a lifetime of prayer and devotion. Fifteen years ago this month, I traveled to Rogersville, Alabama to attend the funeral of my Grandmother. She was nearly 99 years old when she died. She was mother to ten children and grandmother and great-grandmother to numerous more. During the service, one of my many cousins stood up to remember our grandmother. Cousin Mike started by reading this passage from Second Timothy:

"I am grateful to God-- whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did-- when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you."

Mike then spoke about how grateful he was for the faith of our grandmother, whose devotion brought his mother to church. He spoke about that faith that led his mother to bring him to church, and that faith that left a legacy in him. Mike had not always put God first in his life. But the gift of daily faithfulness that bore witness to the power of God and the grace of God in the life of his mother and grandmother gave him a foundation of faith that he could return to. And that faith that seemed as small as a mustard seed moved mountains in his life. Mike said that because of their faithfulness, he could stand before us as one saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I find that the legacy of faith that my own parents left me came not from any great sermon that my father preached, nor of any great act of service by my mother. Rather, the most powerful witness of their lives came in my dad's humility and his joy in the Lord and my mom's daily prayer study, and the way God was always part of our family discussions and reflections on our life together. It was in that daily faithfulness that God was most powerful in my life.

Parents and grandparents, when you worry about your kids and grandkids, keep saying your prayers, keep seeking God's grace each day, and keep bringing your kids to church. Keep bearing witness to God's love for them by who you are and your sincere love for God. Kids, if you ever tire of your parents taking you to church or school or teaching you habits of daily living and daily prayer, know that what may seem small is actually one of the greatest gifts they can give to

you. Their legacy of faith is a foundation that will give you solid ground in all the challenges you face in life. For God does great things through our daily faithfulness.

Our good works may seem small, and our faith may be only a decision to believe in Jesus and to follow Jesus. But that belief and that decision lived out in daily faithfulness can move mountains and leave a lasting legacy. Our purpose is not to achieve greatness, but to be aware of what God is doing in our lives and to participate in God's steadfast love for the world. For God does great things through our daily faithfulness.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, pray each day. Seek God's presence, look for God's actions in your life, listen for God's calls to you and follow where he leads each day. Devote yourself to regular worship of God, regular study of scripture, and regularly serving Christ in the world. As Paul writes, "Rekindle the gift of God that is within you." "For the Steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning." Great is God's faithfulness to us each day. (Lamentations 3:22-23)