

Beloved Community IV

June 24, 2018

If we are to be the beloved community that Jesus imagined and commissioned us to be we must be a community committed to faith, hope, and love. But how do we keep our faith when we are in the midst of tempests all about us? Jesus asks, how can we not? Can you swim in this boiling water? Can you have confidence in the circumstances of the day? Can you direct the boat in the storm? Can we undo what others above us have done? Can we act like nothing is changing around us? I think matters have grown beyond our ability to navigate and the most powerful and effective means to make it to the other side is to wield our faith, exercise our love, and cultivate our hope.

It is the church's role and gift in every generation to wield the power of faith and love and hope amidst the overwhelming waves of anger, greed, and fear. We are to hold up the truth of God's love for all of creation and the responsibility of every person, authority, and institution to live and act appropriately. In the Gospel story, Jesus tells Peter that upon the foundation of faith the church will be established. And to the Church, the keys of God's kingdom are given. What does that mean? Well, I think keys are made to lock and unlock doors leading from one space to another.

Faith is the evidence of things hoped for and the assurance of things not yet seen. Faith prevents us from being overwhelmed by the scary waves all around us, the boat tossing and turning ready to be capsized, the others in the boat filled with anxiety and panic--our faith gives us the ability to see ourselves stepping out upon the firm shore of the other side. Faith helps us see the world like Jesus saw it, a place to be redeemed and not condemn.

Jesus' vision for the world was not the vision Pilate held, or Caiphas, or King Herod. Jesus' vision for the world was not the vision the Sadducees held, or the Pharisees, or the zealots. Jesus' vision for the world was a place where the poor were blessed, the grieving were comforted, the gentle were triumphant, the sick were cared for, the children were cherished, the hungry were fed, the stranger was welcomed, the alien was given refuge, the least were honored, and the proud were mindful to cool their heels. Jesus' faith saw the world as God's kingdom, a place where love could be the way of governance. Where leaders served and laid down their lives for the sake of others. The church is commissioned to keep this vision before the people of the world and never let it be extinguished. The church is called to be prophetic and to proclaim this vision of the world to those who are in the places of power and never remain silent when this vision is dismissed. But if we have lost our faith in the vision that Jesus left to us to bear before the world, then what is the power or purpose we wield in this world?

It is our faith in the life and vision of Jesus for our world that will sustain us in times like these. It will clarify our understanding how the world can be and not accept a world governed by tyrants and exploitation. It will help us not to turn our backs away from those who are most vulnerable. Our faith will empower us to exercise our most powerful

instrument that moves mountains, raises valleys, and opens the doors of God's kingdom where there is darkness and violence and the creation suffers. It is our prayers manifested by our faith that will work wonders with God's help and grace.

God's beloved community: that's what the church is; that's what the world was made to be. Can you no longer see it? Have you lost faith?

I close with this Franciscan blessing:

*God bless us with discomfort
at easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless us with anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation
of people, so that we may work for
justice, freedom, and peace.*

*May God bless us with tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain,
rejection, starvation and wars so that
we may reach out your hand to comfort
them and to turn their pain into joy.*

*And may God bless us
with enough foolishness
to believe that we can make a
difference in this world,
so that we can do
what others claim cannot be done.*

Amen