

9 Pentecost, Proper 11

July 22, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Jeremiah 23:1-6            God confronts the wayward shepherds of Israel. He would send a new shepherd.

Ephesians 2:11-22        Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56      Apostles return, tired, Jesus seeks rest for them; but no rest; compassion

In the OT lesson, Jeremiah had just finished three scathing oracles against dysfunctional kings of Israel who preceded Zedekiah. The treachery of King Zedekiah led to the final defeat of Judah by Babylonia. This line of kings is described as bad shepherds who destroy and scatter God's sheep. God speaks through Jeremiah to say; "You people wanted kings – and I warned you. But I'll correct your mistakes my way –I'll provide a descendent of David who will be the ultimate shepherd of my people." We Christians know that this shepherd was Jesus.

Paul explains to the church in Ephesus that God does not live only among the Jewish Christians, as an exclusive group; but God lives among everyone who believes, who together are the dwelling place of God.

Our God cannot be contained within a mortal shepherd, or a house, or a temple, or within one 'elect' people. You and I can find God, see God, and experience God everywhere and anywhere. We should look for God to be in unexpected places.

The people in the crowd who followed Jesus were reaching out, hoping to just touch the fringe of his cloak;

To catch a sense of God's presence

To feel His love

To experience His healing

To sense His forgiveness

You and I meet in Christian community to be encouragement for each other, and to share in works of ministry that can make God's love known in a world that desperately needs God's love made known. Our motivation is a yearning to catch a sense of God's presence; to touch the fringe of the cloak of Jesus through our actions.

It was that same yearning to touch the fringe of the cloak of the divine that drew the crowds to Jesus. They followed him, not wanting to miss what he would do next, or what he would teach them next. They listened, and realized that they were hearing about a dimension to their existence that inspired them; it excited them; and it even brought healing.

How do you and I reach out to touch the fringe of the cloak of Jesus?

We learn to avoid trying to put God in any box, because God will not stay there. We learn to keep ourselves open to every conversation, every phone call, every chance meeting, every visit from Reverend Karen, or Canon Brian, or Susan

Pimlott from ERD, or Deacon Tina, or our neighbor, or the person we meet while walking our dog; because God dwells in these encounters. (Story: Jose-Luis Orozco – his first wife Cathy passed away on Thursday. He dedicated yesterday's concert to her. He sang Ave Maria in our chapel as a gift to her memory. He felt God dwelling here. He felt blessed; and four of us who were with him in this chapel felt blessed. We touched the hem of the cloak.)

I am working now on programs for the Fall. I have had meetings about Outreach and Mission; about Adult Studies and preschool chapel; about our music program, and Sunday liturgies. As I talk with our wonderful leaders about these different ministries, I know that the presence of God is not in the programs, but in the conversations, prayer, faith, and the intentions of the people who dedicate themselves to these programs. In everything we do as the Body of Christ, we seek to feel the presence of God; we are reaching out to touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak.

Jeremiah was God's appointed prophet, but he kept learning about his relationship with God.

The people in Ephesus were taught by Paul about the Good News Jesus taught, but they kept learning about God's refusal to put any boundary around His love for all of humankind.

The people who reached out to physically touch the hem of Jesus' garment were filled with awe over the new things they were learning about God through his teaching.

Each of these stories tells about learning that God refuses to be put in a box we might build for Him. This seeking to 'touch the hem' is at the heart of being a Christian community; it is at the heart of living the life of grace; it is the reason we do ministry, and work on committees, and hold meetings and music practices that last into the night, and make budgets, and do pledge drives, and attend work days, and volunteer for fundraising events.

I offer you the challenge this week, to reflect on ways you already reach out to touch the fringe of the cloak of Jesus, and how you can stretch your reach for Him.