

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Good Morning Beloved Ones!

Anybody here have investments? Buy stock or invest in gold, etc?

What's the one thing they always say...? Past performance does not guarantee future performance.

Well, throughout history there is one great truth revealed in those who are followers...God is faithful. We read about God's faithfulness in the biblical witness. There are numerous stories in the First and the New Testaments about God's faithfulness. There are even leaders in the faith who have followed because of God's faithfulness...

Martin Luther...travelling home from Law School sought shelter under a rock outcropping in a serious thunderstorm cried: 'Save me, I belong to you!' Luther went home, became a monk...and later would lead the Protestant reformation

John Wesley... .. onboard a ship bound for the Georgia colony in early 1736 when a ferocious storm shredded the main sail and flooded the decks. Many of the English passengers aboard screamed in terror that they would soon be swallowed by the deep. But a group of Moravian missionaries from Germany calmly sang throughout the squall. *They were unafraid of death*, an astounded John Wesley later recounted in his journal.

That journey marked Wesley's first significant encounter with a small Protestant movement that would have an enormous influence on his ministry and the Methodist movement he started.

Two years later, a disheartened Wesley was back in England wrestling with his Christian faith after a miserable time in Georgia. On May 24, 1738, friends prevailed upon him to attend a Moravian society meeting on Aldersgate Street in London.

Honestly, God is not a bargaining chip. We don't tell God if God does this then I will do this in return. God is faithful in spite of what we do.

Last week we witnessed the covenantal promise given to Abraham. Abraham was obedient in doing as God instructed... Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Abraham would have new land and many descendants... and be a blessing to the nations.

Abraham followed the promises of God by faith. In doing so, Abraham and his descendants discover God is faithful to God's promise. Faithfulness is part of who God is... the character of God.

Last week we witnessed the covenant promise, this week we see the reality of that promise. Abraham ended up in the land of milk and honey...but through a series of events, beginning with the story of Joseph, the descendants of Abraham found themselves in another land (Egypt), serving as slaves to the ruler of the land.

They thought the God of Covenant had forgotten them.

But God is faithful... in Exodus 3 we hear that God sees, hears, knows, and comes to the rescue. God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, to return, again, to the Promised Land... through the wilderness to Mt Sinai where the covenant is ratified.

The people proclaim God as their God... as we read today the *Shema*. The people were to proclaim this every day and even to write it on the doorframes.

The Israelites wondered how they would know God was with them...what sign would they have? God led them, day and night (pillar of cloud, pillar of fire).

God is faithful even today...though we may not see pillars of cloud or fire.

The God who delivered the Israelites from slavery is the same God who continues to rescue and redeem. The Easter story reminds us we are rescued and redeemed. We remember what God did to free us from sin in the work of Jesus Christ. We remember when we share in the Lord's Supper. We know God is faithful and is a God of redemption.

Think of Peter and of Paul: we can find ourselves in their stories of redemption...

- Peter denied even knowing Jesus, yet Jesus called Peter to feed & tend to God's people (sheep).
- Paul was persecuting Jesus' followers, yet Jesus came to him to call him to share faith, offer prayer, and gather hope to all the nations beyond Israel.

Is there something this faithful God requires of us? Something we must do in return?

NO! Unlike Luther's quid pro quo statement, God is faithful no matter what, no exceptions! This is the God of mercy & compassion... there is nothing we can do... it is GRACE, freely given.

The question is, however, how might I respond... what role will I play as a faithful follower and inheritor?

Last week we spoke about being inheritors of the covenantal promise... blessed to be a blessing.

Jesus refers to this as the NEW COVENANT, poured out by his blood. So, part of our faithfulness is to continue being a blessing to the nations.

One way to be a blessing is to be missional in our focus...mission-minded.

Missional is thinking of those around us more than those inside the church walls. Being Missional is thinking outside the 'box' to bless the nations, in our community near & far, sharing what faithful God has done in our lives.

We look to the past to see how God is faithful and we know God will be faithful in the future...we may not know the details of the future, but we know that the character of God is faithful and we can trust that we are not alone.

One way to remember how God is faithful is to keep the vision in front of us... of what God is calling us to be. Saint James= Loving & Serving God & Others. The UMC uses the statement: 'to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ

for the Transformation of the World'. My personal vision is 'to share faith, offer prayer and gather hope.'

All of these visions require one thing...connection; engagement with those around us. This is the reason (the WHY) we do things like a Holiday Bazaar, a Spring Fling, a Rally Day with Wellness Screening, offer a Living Well course, host VBS, and serve at CAMP HOPE and the Baltimore County Christian Work Camp, and coming soon, a Fall Festival.

We do these things to connect with people who know Christ, but we do these things to connect with unchurched neighbors. We do this to be agents of change...because 'Transformed Lives Transform Lives'!

We have a vision of being faithful to God even as God has been faithful to SJ to these 227...soon to be 228 years! This vision is kin-dom minded! *And may require doing things differently than had been done in the past.*

How can we be part of building God's kin-dom? One way is by sharing our stories, right where we are in life.

Let me tell you of my encounter at the Lab place yesterday: *4mo ago brain surgery; soon to be commissioned as CLM; coaching others; prays at work*

God empowers us through Holy Spirit...to have courage, boldness, and share our God stories. Think: What has God done for you? Who have you encountered that needed your story?

Remember... and realize that your journey of faith is NOT just for you! Your journey is part of the story of the cosmos (the world God created)! These stories are designed to be shared so that we can be 'the city on a hill and let the light shine for all to see.' (Mt 5:14)

Be thinking of your God story...that moment that you became aware of God's work in your life. Write it down...snap photos or find photos of that moment. I want to include one or two in the upcoming Seashell...

We will have the opportunity to share and perhaps produce a story book of God's stories in Saint James. Amen.