

“God’s Green Marbles”  
The Reverend Michael L. Delk  
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14C) – 6 & 7 August 2016  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

I have a bag of marbles, all the same size, and there will one for each adult in this room. Most of them are yellow, but five of them are green. After worship, before anyone leaves, each person here will draw a marble from that bag. Those who draw one of the five green marbles will be identified as people chosen by God to embark on a special mission.

First, you will go home and put your house on the market. If you live in a rental, you will notify your landlord that you’re moving out tomorrow. If you own your home, you will not list an asking price. Instead, you will sell on a first-come/first-served basis at whatever price the buyer wishes to offer.

Next, take a map of North America and tape it to a wall upside down. Purchase or borrow a dart, blindfold yourself, and throw the dart at the map with your non-dominant hand: lefties throw with their right; righties with their left. If you are ambidextrous, find a friend to throw the dart. Wherever that dart lands, find a way to collect the addresses – and just the addresses -- of the dwellings for sale or for rent in that place, and write each address on identical pieces of paper and put them in a paper bag.

With your eyes closed, choose an address at random, contact the seller, and make an offer. Do not inquire about the asking price. Do not visit or look at pictures or access any information whatsoever on what will become your new home. Increase your bid until seller accepts it, and then if you have a job, quit. Move into your new home as soon as possible, and take with you only the things that can fit in the automobiles you own. After you move in, put those automobiles up for sale on E-bay, and accept the first bid for each one.

Since no one's left the room yet, I can only assume that you do not believe that I have a bag of marbles, or you have lost all of your marbles, or you are ready to step into the sandals of Abraham and alter your life in the most radical of ways, all on the basis of faith that God has called and chosen you. Because the frightening mission of the Green Marble Gang closely resembles what happened to Abraham, with a few differences. Abraham didn't have a map or a dart. He had only a general idea of where he was going and never found a permanent dwelling, and his possessions had to fit on camels and donkeys, not in cars, trucks, vans, or SUV's.

Of course, I don't have a bag of marbles, but God does, and all of them are green, and every day, God gives us choices. We can draw a marble from the bag, or avoid it, and if we draw a marble, we can ignore it, or we can accept the marble and act on it with faith. Now we can take relief from the fact that God summoned Abraham to a unique calling. He got a very special green marble, so none of the crazy things I said earlier needs to happen to any of us.

However, every green marble involves some degree of sacrifice, uncertainty, disorientation, and lasting change. Faith, once accepted, does not invite, request, or suggest. It makes demands. "By faith Abraham obeyed," Hebrews tells us, and "by faith our ancestors received approval." Without an active and dedicated faith, we cannot exist in right relationship with God, and we lose "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," the two things that really give our lives meaning. With so much at stake – with more at stake than we could possibly imagine – how can we live faith?

First, we need to clear up a common confusion by making a distinction between two words: faith and belief. We tend to use them interchangeably, and they are closely related, but there's a big difference. Belief involves what we think we know about who God is and how God

operates and what that means for us. Belief is a brain thing, a reflection on our experience of God, something necessary yet secondary. Belief is a noun.

Faith is a verb. It is a heart and gut thing, the actual primal experience we have of God, that motives us in ways belief simply cannot. Faith involves childlike trust that God will stay faithful to us, no matter how wild life gets. Faith involves comprehensive and unconditional surrender to what God wants, to God's sovereignty and majesty and glory, no matter how inconvenient or insensible it may be. Faith involves standing in awe and reverence and wonder at mystery of God, instead of trying to define and confine it. Faith makes you go a little crazy, in a beautiful sort of way. Finally, faith is a gift from God for anyone ready to receive it.

That's the what, but what's the how? Be disciplined as a disciple, a follower of Jesus, and stay alert. Keep vigil, as Jesus commanded in the Gospel of Luke. Seek God incessantly by allocating your time and energy wisely. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We tend to think as treasure in terms of money, but the real treasure for us in today's world is time. An hour a week or every other week or once a month isn't enough. It's a good start, but it's not enough. Adoring and praising God in worship, that's a precious privilege, a powerful, inspiring experience of God that opens us up to receive faith, but faith means so much more.

Pray like your life depends on it, because it does. Prayer connects us with the sole source of life. It serves as a dependable way to access God's grace. We might be able to survive without grace, I'm not sure, but I know that we can't thrive without it. Confess your sins and receive forgiveness. Give thanks. Be humble and ask for help for yourself and others without shame. It's not selfish. It's an acknowledgement that you depend on God. Sit in silence and just listen for God.

Be merciful and forgive freely. That's a tough one, and it usually takes time, especially when someone's hurt us severely and repeatedly and awoken our anger and rage, but forgiveness brings peace and freedom and offers a profound witness to the faith alive inside us. Resist the temptation to judge and condemn and blame. We've already got plenty of that in the world. Be merciful, and this applies not only to others. Be kind to yourself, not cruel. Forgive yourself. God loves you.

The more we explore, the more ways we find to exercise faith. It's a self-reinforcing, virtuous cycle -- transcendent, supernatural -- that leads to "a better country . . . a heavenly one . . . whose architect and builder is God." The joy in that Kingdom is beyond imagining. And it all starts with a choice about what to do with a little green marble. Amen.