Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Genesis 15:1-6

*Jesus keeps God’s promises*

Each week as part of my sermon preparation I like to listen to Bishop Satterlee’s preaching video. He goes through the lectionary texts for that week and talks about how he hears Jesus working to bring new life, and then he gives suggestions and other helpful information.

This week what stuck with me from his video was the question, “But what do you do when you can’t see the stars?” Bishop Satterlee was asking this as he talked about our first reading this morning from the Book of Genesis.

In the story Abraham is praying to God and he is really struggling with trusting God’s promise to make him a father. Abraham and Sarah are well beyond childbearing years, and he is struggling to hold out hope that God’s promise of a son will come true.

God tells Abraham to go outside and count the stars and then he tells Abraham his descendants will be as numerous as those. I think Bishop Satterlee’s question, “But what do you do when you can’t see the stars” is perfect not just for Abrahams situation, but also for us modern disciples of Jesus when times of struggle happen.

This past week our nation suffered two shootings within days of each other. One carried out by a racist terrorist, and the other by a leftwing terrorist. Terrorist shootings have become so common in our society that most people have become numb to them, and they are considered simply part of the times.

I think they continue to occur because of our failure as a society to love our neighbors, to see the image of God within others, because our society is still both deeply racist, and filled with rage against one another so much so that people come to wrongly believe that violence against one another is appropriate.

The reality is that 30 people are dead. That is not just a numerical statistic. That is 30 human beings who had dreams, who had people that loved them, that had hopes for the world, that had talents to share, that had a favorite food and a favorite color, and there is absolutely no way to replace them.

The reality is also that these may not be the last shootings month or even this year. I have no idea what the families, friends, and communities that those killed in the shootings must be going through. I don’t think our language, or any language has words to describe the feelings and shock they all must be going through.

Even more ironic is that as we are grieving as a nation for those murdered in these demonic terroristic attacks comes the words of Jesus from today’s reading from the Gospel according to St. Luke, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Don’t be afraid? Does Jesus not know what’s going on in our world today? Does Jesus not see the news, hear the cries of the families, friends, and communities grieving the death of their loved ones? How can Jesus tell us not to be afraid when we live with the reality of death all around us every day?

Jesus tells us not to be afraid, but what do you do when you can’t see the stars? What do you do when the whole world around you seem so dark that you just can’t see the stars no matter how hard you look?

To quote Bishop Satterlee, “If you can’t see then you listen.” You listen to the Word of God as we gather together as a worship community. You listen as you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ who was born into this world for you, who lived his life among us as one of us. You listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ who understands suffering because he was persecuted for proclaiming the Kingdom of God open to all regardless of ethnicity, language, gender, age, wealth, privilege, or anything else.

You listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ who understands what it’s like to not see the stars when he prays in the garden asking God to spare him, and when he prays on the cross asking why God has forsaken him. You hear the gospel of Jesus Christ who understands suffering because he endured being beaten, spit on, whipped, and then killed on a cross for the sake of the world.

You listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ where Jesus rises from the dead humiliating sin, death, and the devil by proving once and for all that the love of God is stronger than the forces of darkness and evil.

You listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ where you hear that he ascended into heaven to pray to God for all disciples, to send the Holy Spirit to help us, and from where he will one day return to bring the completion of the Kingdom of peace, joy, love, and freedom from pain.

I would make one addition to Bishop Satterlee and say that if you can’t see the stars and you can’t hear the gospel right now, then you can come and touch it. You can touch the gospel of Jesus Christ when you dip your finger in the baptismal water and remember Jesus promise to you that in Holy Baptism you are made into a child of God, forgiven your sins, and given the hope of eternal life.

You can touch the gospel when you come to the alter and in the gifts of bread and wine receive the very body and blood of Jesus himself, and receive forgiveness of sins, courage and strength in your faith, are joined together with the body of Christ, and where you are sent out to continue to share the gospel in a world of pain.

We all have moments of doubt in our faith. Moments when we struggle to believe in God’s promises to us. That is Ok. It’s natural and you should never feel you are a bad disciple because you have questions or doubts. Questions and doubts prove you are taking your faith seriously, that you want to grow deeper into a relationship with Jesus because you are trying to learn, and that you are taking time to ask God good questions.

When those moments come, I hope you will take comfort by remembering above all that Jesus does keep his promises. Even if we can’t see them happening around us, we can come together as a worshiping community to hear in the Word God’s promises proclaimed again and again.

If you can’t see or hear the promises then come and touch them and be reminded that no matter what they are there, that they are not going away, and that even when we can’t see the stars Jesus is there with us reminding us again and again that he cares, that he is working in the world to bring light into darkness and that he invites us to join him in this. No matter what remember and trust that Jesus does keep his promises to us so, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Amen.