



SAINT LUKE'S

7TH AFTER PENTECOST
PROPER 9B

EZEKIEL 2:1-5

PSALM 123

2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-10

MARK 6:1-13

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS

JULY 8, 2018

I was listening to Gregorian chants
 in a speeding car
 on a highway in France.
 The trees rushed past. Monks' voices
 sang praises to an unseen god
 (at dawn in a chapel trembling with cold).
Domine, exaudi orationem meum,
 male voices pleaded calmly
 as if salvation
 were just growing in the garden.
 Where was I going?

Where was the sun hiding?
 My life lay tattered
 on both sides of the road, brittle as a paper
 map.
 With the sweet monks
 I made my way toward the clouds, deep
 blue, heavy, dense,
 toward the future, the abyss,
 gulping hard tears of hail.
 Far from dawn. Far from home.

Adam Zagajewski, 'A Quick Poem',
Without End

If you read the most recent St Luke's *Gazette* carefully, you may recognize the words of this poem mentioned fleetingly in the suggested summer reading list. Adam Zagajewski's *A Quick Poem* is one which I return to often, and was the first thought which sprang to mind as I contemplated the readings before me, particularly with reference to the words of the psalmist and of the apostle Paul.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks of a mystical experience which brought him an unspeakable joy...but no sooner had Paul begun to absorb the full weight of his experience (one which he coyly speaks of in the third person) than was he given a 'thorn in the flesh' to temper his joy.

We do not have the time to parse here, today what Paul means by his thorn in the flesh, that "messenger of Satan", but complexities aside, I

think if we cut through the esoteric framework of the text we find a universal human experience central to the life of faith. Paul is caught between the joys of heaven and the trials of earth, between an ever distant memory of deep spiritual fulfillment or meaning, and blinding pain which seeks to take this life-giving memory in exchange for the gritty fatigue of the present.

One of the primary difficulties of living a life of faith are the long gaps between those precious moments of clarity in which we see how much God truly loves us, when we hear God's still small voice reassuring us in the quiet of our hearts. If your life of faith resembles mine in any way, these moments feel increasingly distant the more that I need them to be near.

And in the moments when life presses in, and the view of our salvation feels as if it grows dim, we say with the Psalmist '*To you I lift up my eyes, to you enthroned in the heavens.*' The simplicity of the gesture perfectly captures our experience while feeling woefully inadequate to meet our deep need.

Again, from the poem
Domine, exaudi orationem meum,
as if salvation
were just growing in the garden.

How often do we feel as if God does not hear, God does not see our need, and this realization is made even more painful by the memories

of redemptions past? How often does it feel as if our sustained pleas of *Lord, hear our prayer* seem all the more futile against the memory of prayers answered?

I do not intend to be bleak. I only desire to be honest with you. This is Paul's experience of faith; this is mine. I know that it is, in one way or another, a shared experience for many of us here today. And it is into this journey, this tension between heaven and Earth, that the words are spoken: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*

Grace is a light which shines brightest when all other lights fail us, for it is in those moments we are assured that our help came not from our own ability or our own merit, but from a Love which has loved us from time immemorial and will love us long past our journey's end.

God's grace is sufficient, because as Paul reaffirmed for us in Romans 8 last week, we are held by a Love which is present and triumphant in the face of death and loss, pain and sorrow.

God's grace was sufficient in the broken body of Christ upon the cross for us, in spite of the soldiers and political might, in spite of the mockery and the pain, because there was absolutely **nothing** which would be able to prevent the dawn of Easter morning.

My friends, I cannot promise you easy answers in the midst of this tension between our present Earth and our glimpses of heaven. Easy answers did not come for Paul; he appealed to the Lord multiple times

for deliverance, and it did not come in the way he originally hoped it would. They did not come for the psalmist, for he had *more than enough* of contempt. But I can promise you that Grace will be present, made perfect in weakness. It may not come in the way we ask it to, but it will, without fail, enter into our deepest need with us. It will find us, not matter the depths, no matter the darkness. Lift up your eyes, then, and strain to see it, for it will meet you there.

And so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he shows us his mercy.

AMEN

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
487 HUDSON STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG

EMAIL: INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG