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Proper 8 B

“Do not fear, only believe” Mk. 5:36

In all of our driving over the past weeks I have seen a sign in front of a Church which reads: “Fear knocks; Faith answers.” It must be a modern expression of what Jesus says this morning to Jairus and his family. God does not create us to be fearful but rather he creates us with more powerful attributes and they are “joy” and “thanksgiving.” I want to talk to you this morning in our first visit together about your experience of Christ & Church and what God calls you to in this place and then to our mission of ‘joy’ and ‘thanksgiving’ together.

In the Episcopal Church a term which comes from Richard Hooker is that the Church is built upon the three legged stool of “Scripture, tradition and reason.” In recent times a fourth term has been added which is “experience.” This term came originally from a misinterpretation of the thought of John Wesley who certainly emphasized ‘experience.’ But Wesley never moved from the understanding of Scripture as the primary authority of faith and life. He did insist on an ‘experience’ of a living experience of God’s love and the power of the Holy Spirit, through which what the Bible said was proved true in the life of the believer. ‘Experience’ is NOT a separate source of authority in faith.

‘Experience’ is never a final arbiter or chaos reigns. If we simply do what is right in our own eyes, as the Book of Judges wryly charges, then we have no

authority in life. The pluralism running rampant across our world lets anarchy reign or so it seems.

But there is a more profound problem to be addressed and it is a logical one. The 'experience' of Christians, and of churches, is it self that over which and in the context of which the reading of scripture exercises its authority. If 'experience' is itself a source of authority, we can no longer be addressed by a word which comes from beyond ourselves. At this point, theology and Christian living cease to be rooted in God himself, and are rooted instead in our own selves; they become a form of idolatry in which we exchange the truth about God for a human made lie. Those modern humanisms we read about constantly, modern day Gnosticisms, put self discovery and being true to the self as the only 'experience' for which one searches and gives authority in life. This understanding takes a large step away from all known forms of orthodox Christianity.

Deuteronomy today counters this search for 'self' and elevation of 'experience' with terms of true faith in God and His leading. It speaks to the heart of what is most profound about not being 'fearful' but 'faithful' in life. When you see someone in 'need' attend to that 'need.' Faith is not about self but about the God within who directs us to change our world. No 'mean' thoughts are applicable here. Reach out to 'other' in life. If you seek God's favor in life, and if you want to 'experience' God truly, then "Give liberally" to the needs of your community and world. 'Experience is not something we worship but it is something God leads us

toward in understanding His ways. When 'fear' strikes in life look beyond self and the 'experience' of God will overwhelm you. That is 'faith' in action.

More than one of you has said to me that you came to Holy Trinity seeking a Church home and had to look no farther. That is a genuine 'experience' of the Holy Spirit and that is what the Church is to be at its finest. It is not about Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist or Catholic. It is about finding that place where 'joy' and 'thanksgiving' rule your heart and life. It is that understanding of "yet one o'er all the earth" as our opening hymn reminds us. We are one in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is to understand that "our night of weeping shall be the morn of song" and being faithful enough and patient enough to let that happen. The 'joy' you feel in this special place is God's gift to you and importantly to this larger community of Hertford. "Joy" is not something that is to reside in you alone. It is to be a shared way of life for all of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and friend.

So as you have come here or more importantly, as God has 'called' you here, not just Debbie and I, but each of us are 'called' here, what is it that we are to accomplish? Jesus teaches us a great deal in the Gospel today. Fear is not to rule. As Jairus and his unnamed wife were undergoing an experience of nearly unbearable anguish, the fatal illness of a child, Jesus responds as God always does.

There was no avenue the family would not exhaust to find a cure for their child. I heard of one recently who took his son to China because there was a

chance of a cure of a terribly fatal disease. Physicians in Jesus day were few and far between and knowledge of medicine was limited.

There was no miracle ICU unit of Medi-Vac helicopter to come and take this child to greater care. Jairus had probably come to see Jesus heal the demoniac in the synagogue. He had certainly heard of this rabbi with magical powers and regardless of what it might cost him in the community he must try to save his daughter.

To humble himself at the feet of Jesus was anathema to the Jewish understanding but not for Jairus this day. Jairus would also have known that the scribes from Jerusalem had come and confronted Jesus, accusing him of being a sorcerer in league with Beelzebul. Jesus shows his mettle in not wilting to the laughter of the crowd. Prestige was important to the Jewish understanding so going to Jesus for help was a courageous act. To dare to seek joy is what we all must be willing to do.

There is much more that could be said as Jesus gives all a preview of what will happen in the soon to be Resurrection but let us stick to 'joy' and 'thanksgiving' today. We never encounter Jairus again in Holy Scripture but we can rest assured that the carpenter from Nazareth changed his understanding of God's ways forever and I've a feeling he was a pretty powerful witness to all that was to come in Jesus' life.

What is your level of ‘courage’ in professing Jesus? That is where the deepest ‘experiences’ of your life will be found. That is where ‘joy’ and ‘thanksgiving’ are to be most deeply understood. I went to lunch Friday with two of my dearest friends in life and as we returned one of them said “Will we ever find true peace in this world?” I said we already have and though we treated him rather harshly He does not hold that against us and his ‘peace’ is still our promise.

So Holy Trinity, today is the first day of a long journey for us. We will experience much together. There will be great ‘joy’ and great ‘thanksgiving’. There will also be some sadness but like Jairus daughter , we will be ‘awake’ with Jesus forever if we will be people of great faith and not let our ‘fears’ overcome us.