

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from June 8, 2008

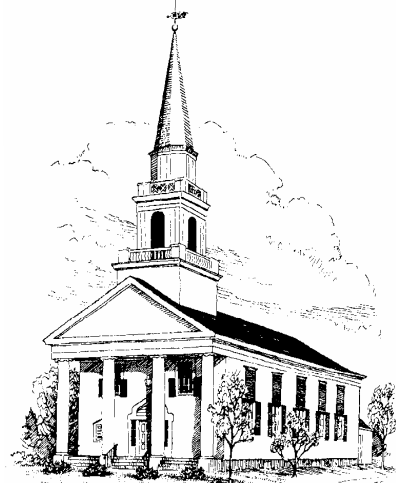
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“Where On Earth Are We Going?”

Scriptures:

Genesis 12:1-9

Matthew 9:9-13, 19-26



Looking through the texts for this Sunday, we encounter a lot of different models of faith. In our lesson from Genesis we encounter Abraham and his wife Sarah who pack up lock, stock and barrel to move to some new place at God’s request. In spite of their advancing age and of all the unknowns of the request, Abram and Sarai, as they are so-called this early in the story, both respond without hesitation to God’s invitation to move away from all that is familiar and move into the future and the unknown. What faith!

In our lesson from Matthew we first hear about the faith of the writer of the gospel of Matthew himself (for it is his call story that begins this reading for today.) Matthew decides to follow Jesus when Jesus calls him. It is this same Matthew who testifies about all that Jesus did in his short life of ministry on this earth in his Gospel writing. Next in today’s reading from Matthew we encounter the faith of an un-named synagogue leader who dares to come and ask Jesus to raise his daughter from death. We next encounter the faith of an un-named woman who had suffered a medical condition of bleeding for 12 continuous years and who was willing to dare to touch even the fringe of Jesus’ cloak to be healed of her condition. Many different models of faith.

And perhaps what this invites us to do here this morning is to try to define faith. One working definition for faith I share with you this morning comes from John Jewell who writes:

Faith is the hinge of our relationship with God—it holds us close to the lord. We may at times swing away and at other times swing toward but always it is faith that connects us and allows God access to our lives.

So faith is a hinge of our relationship with God. I like that this definition allows us to acknowledge that we both swing towards and swing away from God along our faith journeys.

Here’s how Barbara Brown Taylor defines faith. She says:

[Faith] is not a well-fluffed nest, or a well-defended castle high on a hill. It is more like a rope bridge over a scenic gorge, sturdy but swinging back and forth, with plenty of light and plenty of air but precious little to hang on to except the stories you have heard ... all you have to do is believe in the bridge more than you believe in the gorge.

So faith is like a rope bridge, a rope bridge that swings high over a scenic gorge and we have to

believe in the bridge more than we believe in the gorge. The Greek word for faith, *pistis*, is the same root contained in the word for trust. Trust really means to dwell in faith/*pistis*.

What seems to hold all these various biblical stories we have here today is trust. In the Old Testament story, Abraham and Sarah each put their complete trust in God. They put their faith in God. Then later in the biblical story, we see in Matthew and the synagogue leader and the woman put their faith in Jesus, the incarnate God.

Faith depends on our own decision to believe. Faith depends on our own ability to trust and keep our focus on that trust in spite of all that life may deal us.

I imagine we could sit here this morning and each share a story about our experience with faith in our lives, trying to define it and trying to live it. I suspect we often have that experience of trying to define where we are and the reality we find ourselves in. We may ask ourselves, "How did we get here?" We may ask "Where on earth are we going?" We may wonder "Where was God in all of this?" In asking those sorts of questions, we develop our own mythology, our own faith story.

Dorothy Bass, a current and lively historian of American religion with whom I recently attended a workshop she led, tries to bring the life of faith close to home in practical ways. She notes how often we ask one another, "How was your day?" I imagine that all parents of school-aged children have greeted their child with that question "Wow was your day?" or it's often the question we ask one another at the close of a day. It is a kind of question that usually comes from someone who really cares, and is often met with a vague response like, "Not bad." "Most days," Dorothy Bass remarks, "we probably forget to notice."

Then she tells the story of a mother she knows who has quite a different way of asking that question. As she tucks her children into bed each night, their teeth brushed and their hair still damp from the bathtub, she asks them this question: "Where did you meet God today?" And they tell her, one by one. "A teacher helped me." "There was a homeless person in the park." "I saw a tree with lots of flowers in it." And the mother tells her children where she met God, too. Before the children drop off to sleep, the stuff of their day has become the substance of prayer. They enter a thin place and the presence of God is very near.

May we go out this week and ask ourselves the question: "Where did we meet God this day?" Amen.