

So, I did my research this week...

as a matter of fact, I read a few extra commentaries that deal strictly with the parables of Jesus...

As I was doing so,

-The Palestinian military was aiming rockets at Jerusalem...

and the Israeli military has been pounding the Gaza strip with its own rockets

-Typhoon Neoguri was scheduled to come ashore on the islands of Japan...

-headlines were still around regarding the 70 + shootings that Chicago experienced over the 4th of July weekend...

-and 4 children were gunned down in Texas...

and I had to wonder...what does our faith mean in times like this?

Our reading today is a very familiar one...

You probably already know a lot about the meaning of this reading today...

how we need to prepare the soil of our hearts, in other words take time for prayer,

to be intentional in our seeking so that we might see the love of God,

taking root in our lives...

You know that God's presence and love grows fuller, larger

when it is watered and nurtured...

We've talked a lot about the magnificent possibilities that bloom

when we allow grace to flow in us and through us....

So, you've got the teaching of this parable....

I'd like to reflect upon the purpose and meaning

of our pursuit of faith, of our yearning for an experience of God.

Why do we come week after week seeking to understand the teachings of Jesus?

Why do we continue to strive to open our lives and our hearts so wide that we often

feel the hurt and the pain of the world?

Why don't we all go and be totally self-centered and shield ourselves from all the struggle and pain of the world?

Why to we continue to desire to walk the path of Love?

2,000 plus years ago, Jesus of Nazareth gave his life for his deep down knowing of the truth of his teachings.

He refused to bow down to the religious and the political authorities of his time when they told him he had better recant or he would suffer the consequences of crucifixion.

Scholars say, that crucifixion was the worse, most painful, most ugliest form of execution ever devised by the human person.

**Still...he stayed the course of what he knew to be absolutely true:
His God was a God of unboundaried compassion, unrelenting Mercy and absolutely unconditional love
and...he was willing to pay the price for this deep knowing.**

**Did God desire Jesus' crucifixion?...was it in God's plan?...
I refuse to believe that,
because if I believe that...it makes God into an ogre and
the God that Jesus was passionately in love with was not an ogre...
to say that you must 'love' God or else you are condemned is not Love:
you cannot demand, command or legislate Love.
Love is only love when it is freely given and freely received.**

and To freely Love anything... ...always entails risk and loss.

According to the teachings of Jesus: God freely offers magnificent, life enhancing Love to everyone...but it is the free choice of everyone whether or not they will accept it.

**When Jesus talks about seeds planted in good soil
he's talking about his teachings being planted
in an open and willing heart...**

**That is what we strive to do each week in chapel:
open our hearts a little wider and say 'yes' once again.
and then when we live this place we go back to our ordinary lives
we find ourselves a little more kind and a little more loving..
and that has a huge impact in the world...**

As Mother Theresa once said:

**"We can not all do great things,
but we can small things with great love."**

Now, will our open and willing hearts protect us from the fragility of life?

Will our 'yes' to God's presence and action in our lives protect us from harm?

I don't think so.

We are vulnerable, limited beings...

Bad stuff does happen to good people...

Look what happened to Jesus!

If every God was going to protect someone from unjust violence...

it would have been him.

But God didn't.

God did not intervene.

**No, we are not people of faith because it is an insurance policy
against the fragility of life...**

We are people of faith, we come to chapel,

we wrestle with the readings...

we share with those who are hungry

**we seek to grow in gentleness, kindness and respect...
we pray so that our ears, our eyes and our hearts**

**can connect to the strength and courage and joy and wisdom
and Love of the Holy One
who is with us all in absolutely every moment of life on this beautiful planet.**

**There is a power, a Spirit, a grace, a Presence,
that beyond our comprehension,
yet it was visible in Jesus.**

**This Grace, this Presence, Jesus called "Abba"...Daddy
you might call this Presence: God or Father or Mother or Beloved or ultimate Mystery...
you might call this Presence simply Spirit...**

**but whatever it is, it tugs at our hearts and souls...
it offers us strength to deal with our struggles and trials...
it offers us wisdom to choose life giving paths through this world...
if offers us comfort when we are saddened
and hope when we see none.**

**Presence offers us life beyond this life
and it offers us Love
which is always there,
unconditional and ready in an instant.**

**This Presence
the one that we seek ...
is always here...wherever we happen to be in chapel, at home,
on the Dan Ryan expressway...wherever.**

All we have to do is pause and say 'yes'
pause and open our hearts
pause and become aware of what –al-ready- is....

Presence was with those children in Texas...
Presence was with the Palestinian and Jewish teenagers
Presence was with those gunned down in Chicago..

I also believe that Presence is with all of those who committed
such horrible acts...
but they have not yet opened their hearts nor
their minds to this most magnificent Grace...
they have yet to say "yes"...

Presence was with Jesus that night on the cross as he struggled through his horror...
Presence brought Jesus through into transformed new life when he rose 3 days later....
and this is the path for all of us:
Presence will not protect us from the pain that comes, invariably with life,
but Holy Presence is there, with us, in our struggles, our fears, our pain...
Grace will bring us through all of it and into new life...
if we but say "yes".

So...I guess learned, one more time,
that doing my research is not just reading biblical commentaries...
Doing my research must also include looking into the inner realms of my heart...
and to once again, say 'yes'.

I believe this is what we are all called to do, over and over again..
This is why we gather here this day...
to listen with our ears and to help each other say 'yes'

Amen.