

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16, Psalm 50, Luke 12:32-40  
August 7, 2016  
David Teschner

In our Collect this morning, we prayed that God would grant us “the spirit to think and do always those things that are right....” I have a pretty active conscience and am mindful of the scripture which says that if we are unfaithful in little things, we are likely to be unfaithful in big things as well.

So, the other night I watched a show on public television about the eight men who rowed for the United States and quite surprisingly won the gold medal at the 1936 Olympics held in Nazi Germany. After it was over, they advertised both the same show on DVD and a book about the crew, which could be bought at the online PBS store. I didn’t catch the price.

The next day, I decided to purchase both the DVD and the book for our son John’s birthday because he paddles with a 5-person team in outrigger canoes in Hawaii. When I went to order them, I went straight to Amazon thinking I could save some money. In the back of my mind, however, I thought, “Well, shouldn’t I give PBS the business since they produced the documentary in the first place?”

Just before I clicked the final button on my computer to place the order with Amazon, I decided to check out the PBS store. If the price was even close, I would buy from them because I knew it was the right thing to do. Turns out, by ordering with the PBS store, I actually saved about \$5.00.

Sometimes the right thing is the least expensive as well, but more importantly, it soothes the conscience, which some equate with the Spirit of God communicating directly with us.

The Holy Scriptures are, of course, another way God communicates with us. This morning we heard that “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” True faith, accordingly, is believing wholeheartedly in things we have no direct evidence of existing.

One of the reasons Jesus says we should be like children is because they have active imaginations not yet compromised by rational thinking. They are more likely to believe without questioning or needing to see evidence. Here are some examples of children’s simple faith taken from their “Letters to God.”

*Dear God, Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you have? Kevin*

*Dear God, If you watch me in church on Sunday, I'll show you my new shoes. Love, Mickey*

*Dear God, Please send me a pony. I have never asked for anything before – you can look it up.  
Bruce*

*Dear God, I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday.  
That was cool. Katie*

*Dear God, You don't have to worry about me. I always look both ways. Dean*

I had a great phone chat with my nephew last week. He lives in Vermont. He wanted to tell me all about the recent birth of his first child. Couples having children is very common, yet I always think of it as an act of great faith on their part.

When my first wife and I were thinking about children back in the '70s, we in the United States were still very much entrenched in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Both leaders were increasing their nuclear arsenals to the point that I thought World War III and nuclear annihilation were inevitable. Therefore, we had decided we didn't want to bring children into this dangerous world.

Fortunately, at the time, the interim rector of our church was a very wise priest. I decided to go and talk to him about our decision to remain childless. He convinced me that not having children was to be defeatist, while having children expressed hope and faith in a bright and better future. He was right.

In much the same way, the decision to get married, in spite of high divorce rates, is a decision for hope and a future of joyful fidelity. It takes great faith in oneself, one's partner and God to vow to stay together come what may.

We express faith every time we fly in an airplane or get in our cars and drive out of the driveway, for that matter. We have faith in our vehicle, our own abilities and in other people to also obey the rules of the road.

In the gospel today, we are asked to trust that God has prepared a kingdom for us and eagerly desires for us to enter it. How we live in this world as people prepared, dressed for action, ready and waiting will be determined by our faith in a kingdom yet to be fully realized. That kingdom is one we need to live for and die for to gain entrance. The scriptures tell us how.

I'm convinced God made us to eventually grow old with bodies that wear out so we will be eager to let go here, leave this world behind and desire the next rebirth.

You've probably heard this story before, but it is worth repeating. A man knew he was dying and went to see his pastor to make final arrangements for his funeral. They talked about hymns and Bible readings, the usual stuff, but then he made a very odd request. He wanted to have an

open casket in the church, and he wanted the pastor to be sure and put a church fork from the kitchen visibly in his right hand.

Of course, the pastor was puzzled by this strange request and had to ask why. The man told him that as a child his family went to more church suppers than he cared to count. He went on to recall that when the women came to take away his plate after the main meal, they always said, "Johnny, keep your fork; the best is yet to come."

By having that fork in his hand inside the casket, he wanted everyone to know that he believed with all his heart that the best was yet to come for him in God's everlasting kingdom.

I first learned about generosity from my mother, but the first time I can remember practicing it was in college. I had heard about an organization called Oxfam America, which tried to help people in third world countries that didn't have sufficient food.

Maybe for the first time my conscience was pricked. I looked around my small room and decided that I could sell all my record albums and my stereo and give the proceeds to Oxfam, which I did. For me it was the beginning of what I would later learn was Jesus' instructions for us to sell our possessions and give alms as he says here in Luke's gospel.

Especially now as I look toward retirement and sometimes wonder if we will have enough to live on without a full-time salary, I have to remind myself that we always have to live by faith, never knowing completely what the near future holds. I came across two quotes which may help me:

"Financial security cannot make us secure." And

"Though we count our own resources, we cannot count on them."

We will always live in times of uncertainty, but the faith we Christians can always be sure of is that Jesus loves us and he promises that best is yet to come. AMEN.