

Rev. Laura Blazek - September 27th, 2015

I told my daughter that I went to the State Fair looking for a sermon and while I did find a dozen plus foods wrapped in bacon, I wasn't sure that I found a sermon. She just stared at me with slightly raised eyebrows and a "are you kidding me?" look in her eyes. I stared back and just shrugged. She didn't visibly roll her eyes but I could sense a huge mental eye roll as she said, "Bacon is good. God is good. End of sermon."

"That's it?" I asked. "Bacon is good. God is good. And then I just sit down?"

"Yeah, less is more."

Kids have a way of getting to the heart of the matter. They can wade through all the garbage and find the pearl hiding inside. As we grow up, this seems to become more difficult as we discover that life is much more complicated than we once thought. As life becomes more complicated, we tend to focus more on the 'what-ifs' and the 'but what about's'. We get distracted by the nuances. We get bogged down in the superficial and lost in the depths. It becomes easier to believe in what the world tells us, rather than listening to our heart and the Holy Spirit that dwells within. Often, we begin to believe that the pearl is an illusion or that it never existed in the first place. After all, can anything good ever come out of Nazareth?

Nathanael asks this question of Philip before he encounters Jesus for the first time. He discovers in a simple way that, yes, good things can come from Nazareth. In just eight sentences, the gospel writer of John manages to tell us that we aren't just seen by Jesus but are truly known by Him and that great things are in store for those who follow Him. God is good.

Jacob learns this when he hears God saying to him, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go..." We hear the simple message, God is good, resounding in our Psalm. "He forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities... He crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness... He satisfies you with good things... He will not always accuse us, nor will he keep his anger for ever...His mercy is great."

God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good.

Believing in that, trusting in that, is a different matter. When children go hungry in a world full of food. When people die of preventable or treatable disease because of lack of access to health care. When someone we love dies. When you find yourself bullied or abused. When a tornado rips through a community. When someone peppers a school, a theater or a church with bullets

leaving people wounded and dead. When you find yourself lost, alone, and afraid in a world that threatens to chew you up and spit you out. Finding God in the midst of it all, finding the goodness that God brings is...difficult at best.

At times like those, we search for answers to questions we didn't even know we had. We get so focused on our searching, that we forget that we are known and loved. It is like searching for a forest only to discover that we have been standing smack dab in the middle of it the whole time. We spend so much time looking outward that we forget to look inward, allowing the Holy Spirit to get us to the heart of matter, to find the pearl that is always present- that in the midst of our sorrow, anger, fear and grief we are surrounded by the love of God. We are enfolded in Christ's arms because He knows us and loves us. It is that love that heralds remarkable things to come as the Holy Spirit works through us to share the love of Christ with ourselves and each other.

More often than not it is the simple things that show us the goodness of God as we follow Christ's command to love one another. The power of Acts of Random Kindness (ARK) can't be overstated. In the last few days a photo of a McDonald's employee in Chicago who shut down his register to help a disabled man cut up and eat his meal has gone viral. As I looked at the picture, what ran through my mind was, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." We don't need to prove that God is good. We are called to show the world that God is good by sharing our God given gifts with those in need.

In the face of disaster, trauma, and hungry cold lonely nights, it can be the simple acts of compassion and love that stand out the brightest. A pair of socks, a jar of peanut butter, a shoulder to cry upon, a listening ear and so many others, speak volumes. Many times, less is more.

The theme for this year's CROP Hunger Walk is "Believe there is good in the world" but the central message that stands out in their theme is "Be the Good". God's goodness lives in us. When we live the life Christ calls us to live we show the world that God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good. What we give and what we do, can change the world.

In my internet surfing, I ran across this poem by Jan Richardson called, "Known- A Blessing".

First
we will need grace.

Then
we will need courage.

Also
we will need
some strength.

We will need
to die a little
to what we have
always thought,
what we have allowed
ourselves to see
of ourselves,
what we have built
our beliefs upon.

We will need this
and more.

Then
we will need
to let it all go
to leave room enough
for the astonishment
that will come
should we be given
a glimpse
of what the Holy One sees
in seeing us,
knows
in knowing us,
intricate
and unhidden

no part of us
foreign
no piece of us
fashioned from other
than love

desired
discerned
beheld entirely
all our days.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good.

Amen.