

Faith as Awareness
Based on Luke 12:32-40
Aspen Community UMC
August 12, 2007

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Be dressed and ready – keep your lamps burning

As if you were waiting for the master to return from the wedding

Weddings back then could go on for days – depending on how the food and wine held out –

So if we are servants in a household and the master has gone to a wedding

We are not at all sure when he will return.

Are we going to stay up – or be ready to get up quickly and open the door?

If we do, he will serve a fine meal. The master will invite us to recline at the table -

Which was the way people dined at a table back then – and the master will be the host.

Does this surprise anyone? It surprised me. I would have expected the servants

To be chastised in some way – that it would be a matter

Some kind of pejorative judgment - because we were not ready.

But, no, quite the opposite!

This is our reading from the gospel of Luke.

It was hard to select which of the scriptures

provided for us in the lectionary for today.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the lectionary,

The lectionary is a schedule of readings from the text that pastors use each Sunday.

Over that three-year period the lectionary will include

most of the text of the Christian Bible.

The lectionary gives an Old Testament reading,

a Psalm, a gospel reading, and usually another reading from the New Testament.

We can then choose among them. The thing I like about using the lectionary

Is that the preacher is less likely to stay with his or her favorite scriptures.

We must grapple with those we may not know or may not understand, or like.

Yet, we do have choices depending on the season or circumstances,

or the special needs of a congregation.

I want to share with you what a privilege it is to be able to study the text

And work with the ideas - and consider how they may speak to us here today –

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To try and discern how they may be meaningful –
And then to move into one or two of the readings in faith –
That what comes will speak to us all in some way
In some way will connect our spirits with the greater spirit – the bigger picture
that we commonly call the kingdom of God.
I just cannot think of anything I would rather do.

The Old Testament today takes us back to Abraham and Sarah receiving a call
- to venture out to a new place - and a promise from God that they will thrive.
Then there is the Psalm admonishing the reader for unworthy rituals that are without meaning
and calling them to live in a different way – not to fuss over the ritual
but to try to live in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Then there is the reading from Hebrews where the writer celebrates
the faith of those who have been willing to step into the unknown
because they believed they were being called to something new.

Then, there is the reading from Luke,
following closely on what we heard last week.

Remember, someone in the crowd had asked Jesus to get his brother
To divide the family inheritance fairly. That prompted a parable about
how we can hold too tightly to things that are not of true value
And in holding too tightly to material things
Miss the graciousness of God that comes to us in faith.

What I want to call your attention to in the reading today is this:
When the master returns – when he comes and knocks will they be ready to open the door.
It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready
Because the master will serve them and come and wait on them.
Will the master be angry because the servants were not there to greet him?
Will the master be angry if the servants are not up to open the door?

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No, they will simply miss the banquet. They will simply miss a very gracious host.

Anybody read this before? Anybody surprised at what happens?

God is a very gracious host.

The message is for us not to sleep through it. Don't get so set in our ways
(our unbelief or cynicism) that we miss the graciousness of our creator.

This is why I am calling this message "Faith as Awareness."

If we want to be faithful people, that means that we want to be aware of the potential
Of each and every moment.

Let's say that faith is an attitude about life. Part of that attitude is that God is
Always motioning us toward the good, toward what will benefit us most
What will bring out the best in the situation.

Some would say God is in charge. I do not believe that. I believe we have a great
Deal of power and authority in our lives and for some of us - the lives of others.

For me, God is that greater eye, to use a metaphor

That greater brain, to use another metaphor

That greater energy, to use another metaphor

All we can see to do is use metaphor – for God is more than we can imagine.

If you have ever flown in a airplane on a foggy or cloudy day,

All seems dark and dreary on the ground,

but when you get above the clouds - it is a different picture.

Thomas Carlyle put it like this:

“What you can see (yet not see over) is as good as infinite.”

There is much we cannot see over.

For us, it can be a matter of being aware of that altitude.

And, that the divine mystery has a lot more altitude than we do.

And if we fall asleep before we are above the clouds, we will miss it.

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Faith as awareness for today is about being alert enough
to hear the invitation.

But not only that.

It is also about being in a frame of mind – having a mindset -
that is open to be blessed.

Brian Cavanaugh tells the story about waiting in a steamship office (this was several years ago)

to be interviewed for a job as a wireless operator,

a group of applicants filled the room with such a buzz of conversation
that they were oblivious to the dots and dashes that began coming over a loudspeaker.

About that time another man entered and sat down quietly by himself.

Suddenly he snapped to attention,

Walked into the private office, and a few minutes later came out smiling with a new job.

“Say,” one of the group called out, “how’d you get in ahead of us? We were here first.”

“One of you would have gotten job,” the successful applicant replied,

“if you had listened to the message from the loudspeaker.”

“What message?” they asked in surprise.

“Why, the code,” the man answered.

“It said: ‘The man I need must always be alert.

The first one who gets this message and comes directly into my private office

will be placed on one of my ships as operator.’”

Faith as awareness is about being alert enough to hear the invitation,
and being open to the opportunity.

That’s the first part. The second is that
when we think of faith and awareness together,

it is a good idea to remember
that the divine intrusion (so to speak)

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happens at surprising times and places and those times and places
may be uncomfortable – and probably will be.

Kind of like that Arab chief that tells the story of a spy captured
and sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army.

This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals
a choice between the firing squad and “the big, black door.”

The moment for execution drew near, and the guards brought the spy
to the Persian general. “What will it be,” asked the general,
“the firing squad or “the big, black door?”

The spy hesitated for a long time. Finally he chose the firing squad.

A few minutes later, hearing the shots ring out confirming the spy’s execution,
the general turned to his aide and said, “They always prefer the known to the unknown.

People fear what they don’t know. Yet, we gave him a choice.”

“What lies beyond the big door?” asked the aide.

“Freedom,” replied the general. “I’ve known only a few brave enough to take that door.”

What is this saying?

The best opportunities in our lives may
stand behind the forbidding door of the great unknown. ¹

Faith as awareness – When we consider awareness to be important in our lives
as faithful people, we want to be aware of how our fears can
keep us from opening the door to the master when he comes
To bring us that banquet – that blessing – that surprise.

Do we have time for one more image? I don’t want to leave you with the firing squad.

In 1986, two brothers who live in a kibbutz

near the Sea of Galilee made an incredible discovery.

As these two Israeli fishermen monitored their equipment on the beaches of Gennesaret,

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they noticed something they'd not seen before.
Something covered with mud glistened in the sun.
Upon examination, archeologists determined that what the brothers had discovered
was a fishing boat dating from the time of Jesus.
The only reason the artifact was discovered was because of a three-year drought,
which caused unusually low water in the lake.
So, here was some unusually dry land, but...

The Bible tells us that in times of spiritual dryness, God may uncover
Something of fabulous value within.²

And here the image jumps from the fisherman being alert enough
to see the ancient boat
to you and me being alert enough
to recognize divine surprise,
the blessing on the other side of the barriers
inside our own minds and hearts -
behind our own closed doors.

We have encountered from not having had the courage to open a door.
Perhaps we might think now about the divine surprises
that might await us when we do open those doors -
doors of our hearts and minds.

Do these images, these stories, speak to you?
Think what divine surprise you might enjoy if you stay up and open the door.
I don't what your door looks like, or what blessing – what banquet –
the divine wants to set before you.
But I will promise you that the divine does want to set it before you.

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Most people miss it.
That is what this is about.

Faith is more than awareness, but to link the two, keeps us aware of
the possibilities in our lives,
the divine love Jesus wants us to know
and what happen when we make ourselves available to the blessings that are in store.

¹ Don McCullough

² Greg Asimakoupoulos