

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost – Christina Smerick

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

I have a confession to make. Some of you will be tempted to point a finger and say, “Oh ye of little faith!” and you’d probably be right to do so. Here it is: I have real trouble believing that God will perform great miracles in front of me. I admit that I am by nature a skeptical person, and so perhaps one could say that I simply lack the eyes to see the Big Miracles, the obvious signs of God’s immense power and intervention. If I were one of the disciples with Peter that day, I would probably have hung back and maybe even rolled my eyes a little when Peter boldly claims that Jesus is the Messiah. I’m sure I would have been one of those providing a list of what ‘some people say’—Elijah reborn? (look for verification...nothing). Um, some say John the Baptist? No? No rock, I. But I do see God in things, and events. Otherwise, I don’t know how I could in good conscience stand here before you and proclaim the Word. But I see God in the small things. And although all my commentaries stated that there was no connection between our various lessons for today, I defy them with my strength of connectedness and say oh yes there is! And it is that God is in the small things, the quotidian (that one was for Brian), the everyday. God may not create fireworks, stop walls of water with his invisible hand, or move mountains with a command, at least not in my myopic sight, but He is in those small, normal, un-spectacular people and moments and choices—and thus He is far more present to us than a God who swoops down every now and then to wow us with some divine display.

We first find God in the small things in our Exodus passage—and you had better find God there, because God is not mentioned by name in the entire passage. You don’t have the people of Israel calling on God, you have no decrees or proclamations from Him. Instead, we have an ancient story, dusty and Other, of a vicious King and a trapped people. Where is God? Why does he not smite this king NOW, in front of us, with awesomeness? This is a bad king, who is trying to destroy God’s promise to Abraham via the slaying of all the male children. If there were a time when we would say, hey, bring on the fireworks, it would be this kind of situation. Instead, what saves the Hebrew people are lying midwives, mothers who hope beyond hope, sisters who keep an eye out, and princesses who are compassionate. In other words—every day people, doing their things, being just a little bit braver or nicer or cleverer than usual, with extraordinary outcomes. We have the famous midwives, 2 of the few women actually named in the Bible, making up a fairly good lie on the spot to cover over their disobedience to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh is no idiot—if the midwives won’t obey, then let the boys be born—and then drowned. But then again, in the face of certain punishment and death, a mother disobeys the command, hides her boy until he’s more robust, and then does something that seems silly and hopeless—she makes him a floating cradle. As if someone, seeing a baby floating in the Nile, would not KNOW that this was a Hebrew child. But she does this, and she enlists her clever daughter to help. And then a princess comes along, and sees the sweet babe, and has a

moment of decency. (Perhaps more than one—perhaps this princess rescued lots of babies. Who knows?). A clever sister, a desperate yet hopeful mother, a kind princess... We find the hand of God at the beginning of Exodus not in great feats involving frogs and locusts and blood. We find it at work in the lives of the womenfolk. A baby is a small thing indeed. Women in the ancient world—also small in terms of power and influence. And there is where we see God at work.

Paul reminds us of this in reminding us of our many different gifts. We are one body—the body of the Church, the body of Christ, and we have many gifts. But these gifts are ordinary things—teaching, preaching, giving, leading, cheerfulness even. There are no superheroes in this list, no magic powers of flight or invisibility or being able to shoot lasers out of your eyes. Instead, we are reminded that we are recipients of transformation—that our outlook must be reshaped by God, and that the fruits of this new perspective will manifest themselves in the gifts we already have. The church is not called to perform impossible miracles and wow a cynical public to our cause. The church is not called to impress people with our extraordinariness. We are called instead, individually and corporately, to do what we do well, to do those things in service to the God who transformed us, to allow God to work through our everyday cheer, grace, faith, hope, etc., to redeem the world. I am a small thing. You are, too. Our skills and gifts are ordinary things, not unique to us. Yet God works through them.

And, in the great scheme of things, the Church is a small thing too. Peter is the rock of the Church, and we love Peter, don't we, because he is not terribly impressive. More of a swaying palm than a granite boulder, Peter changes with the wind. The audacity of the charge Jesus gives the Church is made clear by to whom He makes it—the gates of Hades will not prevail against a church based upon...Peter? The guy who denied Jesus thrice. The guy who sometimes just does NOT get it. In spite of recognizing Jesus as Messiah. (One has to wonder why Jesus tells them not to tell anyone else...). And yet to this fragile church, 'built' upon this fragile, all too human Peter, is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and the power to loose and to bind. Yikes. I don't know about you, but every time I read this passage, I panic a little inside. I think, oh no...we are not the ones you want doing this, Jesus. Um, have you seen us? We can't even hold it together for 10 years after your resurrection—the infighting, the Peter v. Paul thing, the heresies and councils and schisms and reforms and counter reforms? We are not worthy, to quote a wise wise man by the name of Wayne. Yet through this all-too-human church, this small thing, God has granted that the kingdom of Heaven will come.

So yeah. I have trouble recognizing the big miracles. Ironically, I believe with my whole being in the small ones. The moment of grace when one friend is there for another; when a woman reaches out and cares for a small slave boy; when women maneuver the best they can in awful circumstances; the moments of faith when a person steps up and leads the church in a new direction; or simply smiles and greets every person he sees; or guides those who seek; these are the places I seek and see God. It's a good thing, a great gift, that our Scriptures are full of such moments. Amen.