

Well, I want to start off today telling you about my dog, Keen. Some of you have heard, and others have not, that Keen has cancer. Specifically, he has osteosarcoma which has shown up in his carpal joint of his left foreleg. I'm telling you this because it has made me very sad and his treatment options are limited. One thing about preaching, as opposed to other sorts of speechmaking, is that we bring our whole selves to the pulpit. That's not to say that the only thing I'm going to talk about is my self and my problems! Far from it.

But life is emotionally challenging for me this week and so I wanted to share that with you before taking up our scripture readings for the day. Keen will have surgery this coming week and then chemotherapy. God willing this will allow him to live a year or two more and have a less painful life. If this were ordinary times, I'd save this for announcement time in the service. But there is no announcement time right now. But there will be again at some point!

Last week I talked about taking up our cross. And well, sometimes I guess we don't have to go looking for a cross to bear, it comes to us. Today's readings seem to me to center on both the cross from Paul's letter, and not forgetting; we can't forget the power of God, faithfulness of God and the love of God.

We don't want to forget the commandments that the Holy One has given us as a roadmap for faithful life. These help us remember that our lives are shaped by God who walks with us and gives us a guide to show his everlasting covenant with us. God reminds us that we have already experienced that love since it is our God who brought us out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery, and gave us freedom. We must not forget.

Jesus comes to the Temple in our reading from John's Gospel. He sees that the people there in the Temple have forgotten what the House of worship is for. It is not for buying and selling. It is supposed to be a place of prayer. We are also reminded that the building itself is not God. In Jesus we find God's Temple.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is about not forgetting what Paul taught the new Christian congregation about the cross of Christ and its meaning for us. Episcopal Churches commonly display an empty cross on the altar, not one with Jesus hanging on it, a crucifix. We want to emphasize that Jesus was raised from the dead. We must not forget that Jesus died. **And** we focus on the fact that Jesus is no longer on the Cross. It's not death we want to keep in the forefront, it's the resurrected **Life** that we must not forget and hold in our hearts. We don't deny the cross, or the death of Jesus. We remember that too. But we emphasize the victory we have in Christ over sin and death.

We certainly will never forget this last year. We collectively have faced brokenness and loss in our country and our world these last twelve months. The death toll from the coronavirus has now

surpassed 500,000 souls lost to this awful disease in our country alone. Our lives have been upended because in trying to stay safe we've been unable to see loved ones, we've been stuck at home, and in the latest phase, we search for a vaccination appointment and worry about how effective it will be. Earlier in the year we had shortages of necessities, we searched stores for face masks and cleaning products. Now what we seek is a little piece of cardboard with our vaccination date and vaccine lot number on it.

Yes, we are seeing light at the end of the dark tunnel that we've been in for such a long time, and yes, we've learned much about ourselves our resilience and what is important to us as Christians and as fellow sufferers. I hope we never forget how we've **come through** this devastating health crisis. Communication with each other is important. Finding ways to hold on to traditions, prayers and hymns is important. Seeing Christine's photography through the seasons at Trinity is important. Through all these things we won't forget.

I'm thinking of Paul in his journeys and preaching around the Gentile cities of Asia Minor and Europe. For Paul, the power of the Cross was a central topic for him in preaching and in letters sent to his people. After his visits to various cities and towns he wrote letters that could be read aloud to the new congregations that he had formed and left in his wake. Paul didn't want the congregations to forget him or, more importantly, forget the message that he brought.

The short portion we heard of the letter written to the people in Corinth reminds them and us of the nature of their faith in Christ. It brings to light one of the difficulties with being a Christian in a town made up of Gentiles and Jewish communities. He tells the congregation that they may be told that they are fools, believing in a messiah who doesn't triumph in battle, who instead gets arrested and killed. What sort of religion and message is that the Christians will be asked?

Paul knows that it would have been much more palatable to the people if he played down the fact that the Savior didn't save himself. At the crucifixion Jesus was asked several times why he didn't save himself if he is the King of the Jews. If he is God's son, why doesn't he just come down from that cross. We can't forget that. And Paul must not let his people forget that. Paul's companions might have counseled him, "Let's focus on the good stuff. Resurrection! Ascension!" And yet, Paul took the more difficult path to tell the whole story; Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God through his whole life, teachings, actions, death, and resurrection.

We might think it's an odd strategy for someone who wants to win converts. Paul says, "...Jews demand signs and Gentiles desire wisdom but we proclaim Christ crucified." (1:22-3) Why? Because it is through this "foolishness" that we come to see triumph, life, forgiveness, transformation and so much more through the love of God which will overtake us if we walk this path with the Spirit of Jesus. And we don't want to forget that. We remember it all, and we remember the victory that God has in store for each of us.