

The LORD passed before [Moses], and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness... Exodus 34:6 NRSV

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23 NRSV

Last week we talked about how God is present with us—the Divine Presence in our midst
That leads me to remember that God is faithful
God is always with me and will never leave or forsake me
God is faithful to Lead and Guide us

Where we get confused is when our expectations don't match our experience
But God wasn't there when _____ - fill in the blank
If God is real, why are so many people starving?
Why? Why? Why?

This is one place as Christians, that we aren't careful with our language
Frequently when people face hard things, I hear them say, "God is in control"
Or, "It is the sovereign will of God"

But that sets up the scenario by which we struggle
If God is in control, why did God allow _____?
I don't want a God whose sovereign will demands the life of my child!
*You give and take away / You give and take away / My heart will choose to say, Lord /
Blessed be Your name [Chorus by Matt Redman]*
Sung multiple times as a bridge
I get that in good times and in hard times—we choose to bless the Lord
Really what the song is about
But the emphasis on God gives and takes away creates pain
That it is God who causes the hard things in our lives

Taken from Job 1:21—*"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*

Job's response as the bad things begin happening to Job—loses it all
We struggle with this book
First paper I wrote in Seminary was on the book of Job
For the first time, I began to grasp what the book was about
Oldest written book in the Bible
Counters the common belief that bad things are a result of sin
Who sinned to cause this trouble?
Truth is that bad things happen!
It is ok to ask why?—even when there is no answer—Job did
We need to face into the difficulties of our lives—all the way
Avoid plastic answers and platitudes
In the end, we find that God is present even in the difficult places
Job saw God and recognized a greater truth about who God is
It is an invitation to find God within our struggles and see God fully

God has given us free will—we all have choice to act good or bad
Truth is that bad things happen to good people
God never promises that in following God, our lives will be good and turn out nice
God does promise that God will always be with us and accompany us everywhere

Ultimately, I have come to see that God's presence is more important than anything else
In that I see the faithfulness of God—the solid and absolute faithfulness of God

In 2002 I hit a particularly low time in my life

As I came to Seattle, I had a vision of a "great people to be gathered"
And as many gathering places as there are Starbucks
And a variety of gathering places like varied Starbucks
But we seemed to be diminishing instead and we felt puny
As I listened—I was led to the story of Abraham and Sarah
Promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations—many descendents
Yet for 25 years—he had no children
What was he to do? What did God want from him?
It wasn't in the human "fixes" for the problem
It became clear that all God asked was for them to be faithful
We are great at the human "fixes" and pushing for results
Then we are disappointed with the lack of answer—lack of results
We are very disappointed with answers that don't match expectations
All God asks is for us to be faithful—we are enough!
We have everything that we need to be faithful and obedient to what God is asking of us

In 2015 we sit here—aware that our numbers have decreased even further and finances are down

What are we to do?
Read up on church growth principles? Study growing churches? Import a fix?
Or... are we dying? Has God given up on us?
What if we don't make it? Whose fault is that?
Could it be that we are preparing the future for the next generation?
What expectations are we holding on to—that do not serve us well going forward?

In the 90s when I was in Seattle the first time and that dream of a new church didn't materialize

I saw it as my failure—that I had done something wrong and that I had not heard God's Leading
I believed that if God was in it and God called me—it would be a successful venture
What I learned was that God's call is not always met with success
It doesn't mean that God didn't call—however people don't always respond—reality
My call is not to success—but I am called to faithfulness!—faithfulness in all things

We are to Listen and Listen again—when it isn't working as expected—simply go back to God and Listen

And what if I didn't get it all right the first time—Listen again and accept God's grace
If we stay in Listening and Faithfulness mode—we will be given the next steps
However, God rarely gives us a blueprint for the next 10 years
And God never gives us a guarantee that it will turn out the way we expect
It is a minute by minute, moment by moment Listening for the next step
Take one step and Listen again for the next step
Stay faithful to this simple process

What does faithfulness look like in 2015 for North Seattle Friends Church?

In 2002 I had an assumption: that God was grow us first and then do big things!
I proved to be wrong—God did big things in us without growing us first
God takes what we offer and uses that to do God's purposes in our world—it's enough!

What do we have to offer?

Faithful and obedient people
A building and land
Quaker understanding of God and how God works among us
Etc...

What is God doing in our midst?

Gift out of the blue of someone that wants to buy our property—and a new building
Living the truth of God out in our daily lives
Leading us into wholeness and fullness—both within each one and as a body
Growing our understanding of God and how to live faithfully

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