

Lectionary 33 Year A 2020
November 15, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There have been a lot of uncertainties in our world this year. Due to the coronavirus and elections, we have probably found ourselves asking “What if...?” What if we are exposed to the virus? What if the grocery stores run out of toilet paper? What if our church suspends in-person worship, and we lose people? What if we face another shutdown like we did earlier this year? What if the economy doesn’t recover? What if our candidate loses the election? What if things don’t change? What if things do change?

And we can do a lot to protect ourselves from different “What if...?” situations. We can take precautions to mitigate the risk of becoming ill. We have various levels of government in place to ensure that no single person has absolute power. We take out insurance policies to handle other risks and “what ifs,” like fires, car accidents, medical expenses and more. We try to leave as little up to chance as possible, trying to be prepared for anything that might happen.

And in trying to prevent ourselves from being caught off guard, these questions have the potential to take over our lives. They can take hold and consume us in an endless cycle of wondering and worrying about the “what ifs” of life. But unfortunately, it’s impossible to entirely remove the “what ifs” from our lives. We can be more or less prepared for these things when they arise, we can mitigate the risks, but certain “what ifs” happen regardless of our preparedness.

In our gospel reading today, we hear about a man who became caught up in these “what ifs.” There was a man going on a journey, and he entrusted his property to his slaves. To the first slave, he gave five coins. To the second, he gave two coins, and to the third he gave one coin. The first and second slaves, using good financial practices, went out and doubled their money. The third slave took the one coin that the master had given him, and caught up in the “what ifs” of life, he dug a hole and buried the coin in the ground. What if the investments didn’t return as he expected? What if the banks folded and the money was lost? What if the master was not to be trusted? The third slave got so caught up in these “what ifs” that rather than take a risk, he decided to do nothing at all with the money he had been given.

This third slave thinks he is doing the right thing, because he is doing what is safest. He wants to be sure that he doesn’t lose what his master has given him. But the problem is that in attempting to avoid loss, he has done nothing at all. Perhaps it would have been better for the third slave to have taken a risk and lost the money, rather than bury it and wait. And so, when the master returns, the first two slaves get rewarded for being good stewards, but the third slave is punished.

Most of us truly want to be faithful stewards of our time, talents and possessions. It’s not that we don’t want to be generous, but we get caught up in these “what ifs” of life like the third slave. We want to be prepared. And so, these “what ifs” of life become crippling. They inspire us not to action, but to inaction. They lead us to hoard for ourselves rather than give to our neighbor. They cause us to cower in fear of change rather than step out in faith. We, like the third slave, are more likely to bury our money in the ground than to take the risk of stepping out to see the abundance that God can create.

There are always going to be ifs in life. Nothing can change that. But certain situations demand that we take action despite the ifs and risks.

As we face another period when in-person worship is suspended, we are stepping out in faith and taking a big risk. We are trusting that God will sustain us and the church through this time, and that God will be with us despite our distance from one another. We are learning new things, worshiping in new ways, and reaching out to our neighbors differently than before. Rather than ignoring the public health emergency, and putting peoples lives in danger, we are trusting that God will provide during this new phase of church life. Even though we have found ourselves somewhat forced into exploring ways to

worship virtually, we may find new opportunities because of it. We may reach people that we haven't before, sharing the message of God's love even more abundantly. We are called to trust that even in the midst of hardship and distance, God is still present and active, and that God may be doing something new that we have yet to realize.

In the uncertainties that we are currently facing, we are called to live into a time of transition and change. It's not a life of security, it can be scary and uncomfortable, and worrying at times, but even in our time away from one another, God can create abundant new life.

The reality is that a life of faith means taking risks. Right now, that risk is to distance ourselves in order to protect ourselves and the community around us, and enter into a period of time where the church looks vastly different than it has in the past. Yet, in taking these risks, we trust that God will sustain and provide for our ministries now and into the future.

And living faithfully, trusting in God isn't something that's new to our church. We've taken risks and trusted God to provide in the past. There are plenty of "what ifs" that could have kept this church from starting up King's Kupboard. We could have been caught up in the need for money, volunteers, countless resources, and getting the word out. And I know things have not always been easy. But if we hadn't taken a risk on King's Kupboard, if we hadn't stepped out in faith, we wouldn't be nearly 20 years into this ministry of feeding the hungry people in our community. If we hadn't taken a risk on King's Kupboard, we wouldn't have connections to the clients we've met over the years, and we wouldn't hear the heartwarming stories of being there for people when they truly needed us and inspiring them to give something back after they were in a better financial place. The clients and volunteers at King's Kupboard know God's blessings, and they experience God through our ministry. It may not be the traditional church experience, but it is most certainly the work of God.

God calls us to overcome the fear "what if", and to be willing to change and adapt despite the risks. And when we are willing to do so, when we do step out in faith, there is always the possibility that amazing things will happen. God just might be at work in our midst, creating abundant life from our uncertainties and fears.

And the promise that we have is that when we do take these risks, we don't do it alone. Churches throughout the world are going through the same experiences that we are right now. God has provided a community for us in the body of Christ, the communion of saints throughout the world. Church communities have the ability to reach out to one another and support one another with various gifts through this time of change. We all can encourage one another and build each other up. We pray for one another, and empower each other to step out in faith. We take risks of truly living in this world and no matter what happens, we have people here in this community and throughout the world who will support us and who care for us.

The body of Christ, the communion of saints is God's gift to us. And no matter what happens, we, along with all our brothers and sisters in Christ belong to God. In the waters of Baptism, God claimed us as God's children, gathering us into the one family of God, and giving us the gift of eternal life. No matter what "ifs" come our way, God promises in Baptism that none of these "ifs" will separate us from God. And at the last, as promised in 1 Thessalonians, we may trust that our salvation comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him". No matter what "ifs" come our way, we belong to God, and we live with God forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.