

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52
23rd Sunday after Pentecost B; 10.27.24; G. Miles Smith+

[Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.]

Just in case...anyone...might be *stressed*...or *distressed*...about...well...any number of things...I want to give you something.

Well, actually I want to give *me* something too. And I want to give it to *us* as something we can hopefully *understand*. And then, if you wish, we may carry it forward with us...as a kind of *mantra*...to help us.

This is not something I've thought up. But it *is* something that the *apostle Paul did*. And he repeated it in *three* different places in his letters. But it is easy to miss it, because each time he speaks of it, he speaks of it differently. [If you want to look at these passages later, then here they are:

- 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 1 Thessalonians 1:3
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8.]

This gift from the apostle Paul is a *triad*...*three words*. It's pretty likely that every one of us has heard it before. But maybe we've tended to shelve these three words in our mind's library...under the category of "weddings." But this triad is so much more than that. Jesus never named these three words together like the apostle Paul did later...and yet Paul was right to recognize...*these three words name much of the basic truth of Jesus' life and teachings*...*a real and crucial gift to us...from God*.

These three words were later recognized by the *Church* as being *so important* that there is a tradition that continues to this day of calling these three words the "theological virtues" of Christianity. If you have a Roman Catholic background, then you've probably heard of that language before. |

So I guess I've delayed the big "reveal" about as much as I can...to keep you in suspense.

The words I want to give *us*...that the Church has passed down to us...from the apostle Paul...and from the heart of Jesus...is:

Faith, hope, and love.

And if you remember 1 Corinthians 13 then you may want to say: "Faith, hope, and love...but the greatest of these is love." And yes that is true—especially for the point that Paul was trying to make to the church in Corinth that had become pretentious in their faith and hope, and yet quite unloving. But he also understood the greater truth that once faith and hope are ultimately satisfied by our full communion with God in the life everlasting, that even faith and hope will no longer be needed, and that the only thing that will remain is...love.

But we are hardly there yet. And we urgently need the gift of...faith, hope, and love...if we are stressed...or distressed...about...any number of things. So, a few quick words about...faith, hope, and love. For, without us quite realizing it...each of these can *become something else*...which can then leave us orphaned...amid stresses and distresses.

Faith...can become a matter of having any number of *ideas* about God...and deciding that we are rather *fond* of them. This is not so different from what kind of car...or handbag...you might like. But faith is actually more like your *relationship* with someone...someone you *know enough*...to be able to *trust*. That is a precious thing...to have

such a relationship with someone. And when we do, it gives us an *anchor* in our life...that really matters. That is the kind of faith in *God* that we are really talking about in Church. When we are stressed or distressed then “faith” asks us: *Do we know enough about God...to know that we can trust God...with everything...even when that everything...is stressful or distressing?* |

Hope...can become a matter of *wishing* that things will turn out the way we *want* them to. This is not so different from wishing we will get what we want from *Santa Claus* when we were a child. But it can also of course take much more serious and poignant forms of wishing...that we will be *saved from something we are afraid of*. We should of course wish to have what we need...and to be spared what is destructive. But even that is not actually *hope*. Hope...is Jesus...walking into the Garden of Gethsemane...after the Last Supper...wishing...and praying...that his suffering will not come to pass...but even when that wishing and praying doesn’t avert his suffering...he still *hopes in God*. When we are stressed or distressed then “hope” asks us: *Do we know enough about God...do we trust God enough...that regardless of what happens next...we believe that God will ultimately prevail...and all shall be well?* |

Love...can become a matter of just our *feelings*...and that is easily the way we think of love. But the love of which Paul speaks means seeking to do right by others *for the sake of God*. And also when we *love God*...we are doing so not because of what we wish we’ll get...but we love God for *God’s own self*...who is good... true... trustworthy...and all hope. When we are stressed or distressed then “love” asks us: *Do we know enough about God...have we experienced enough of God...to love God...and to love others because of God?* |

This is a lot to take in. But this is where I need to stop and leave you with the *mantra* we can carry forward with us, if you like. One way to define a “mantra” is as...a word or collection of words... which can be repeated...silently or aloud...so as to help us focus...on what is most important. So, of course, here it is:

Faith, hope, and love

When we are stressed:

Faith, hope, and love

When we are distressed:

Faith, hope, and love

When we fear what-in-the-world is going to happen next:

Faith, hope, and love

Faith, hope, and love