

October 3, 2021

Hebrews 1:1-4;2:5-12

“Don’t Give Up Too Soon”

Welcome to service on world communion Sunday! I love this day. I love it because it reminds us we share life and faith with people all over the world. It affirms for us there are faithful people across the globe with whom we share the most personal and important connections to God.

But it would be easy on world communion Sunday to imagine quite the opposite. There are indeed varieties of people all over the world who are quite different one from another. Some of them share our convictions about God in Christ and some do not. With so many people all over the world who vary in language, culture and religion – how do we know understand this patch work quilt?

The questions about reliably connecting with God have been around since people have. And it is difficult to imagine how to make sense out of things when we only see one another as competitors and belief about God is just one more area about which we argue.

But we have it backwards. We imagine our efforts enable us to discover the truth about God. Our faith tells us God connects with us. It is God’s initiative and love which bring us here today – not our intrepid religious sleuthing. The world is a mosaic of difference – but God has come after us in Christ. And we really need that because life is hard.

But you knew that. God loves you more than you will ever know...so why are there days when it hurts so much? How many of you have ever read the story or seen the movie, *“A River Runs Through It?”* The story was autobiographical, and the movie was directed by Robert Redford. The scenery from Montana and the jump in fly fishing across the country after its release were both remarkable.

The father in the family is a Presbyterian minister. I thought Tom Skerrit made a great Presbyterian minister in the movie. The family had two sons and the narrator was one of them. At one point he tells us the family had a wall in the house painted with the words, “God is love.” He acknowledged there was love in their family and so the words made some sense. But he then said something like,

“But we knew the world outside our home was filled with mean sons a *****, who didn’t know anything about love and we better watch out for them.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to people today who were struggling with this view point. They had decided the way to access the riches of God was through being interested in Angels – because clearly Jesus wasn’t carrying the freight. The result is the author spends a great deal of time in this letter asserting the superiority of Jesus to any angel.

Angels aren’t really our issue today. We just want to know why the world is such a mess. And the author is clear – Yes, Jesus has authority over this world – No, the world is not ordered and does not run in the way Jesus wants – yet.

Jesus shows us what God is like – but the world does not show us what God likes. “Not yet.” And our hope in this situation is this, “We see Jesus.” Jesus is the one who embraces us. Jesus is the one who lives with us – especially when it hurts.

This can be encouraging on the one hand...and disappointing on the other. A great German theologian once said, “*God doesn’t protect us from suffering, but in suffering.*” And we are thinking, “May have a different German theologian please?” We are not happy with the edges of life that hurt. We know suffering can come – but we never sign up for it on purpose.

And that’s the difference between us and Jesus. Jesus, who had more to lose than we do, embraced human existence, and suffered on behalf of – wait for it – *everyone*: the whole world – which we remember on world communion Sunday.

We are Jesus’ brothers and sisters. We who are broken, tired and worn. We who suffer and die...we who are embarrassed by our human frailty and weakness...but we do not embarrass Jesus. He claims us as his brothers and sisters. Jesus’ suffering ties him to us in gut wrenching ways. It is how we know what God is like and God knows the human experience.

Life can be hard and the world unforgiving. But don’t give up too soon. In the midst of it all there is a gift of grace. “We see Jesus.” And that, it turns out, can be enough.