

#39 10-11

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10

Psalm 124

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Be Willing to March into Hell

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

I was inspired for this sermon by Kelly DeLameter's farewell recital last week. He sang for his family and friends on the afternoon before he was to leave home for college. It is such a major step for any new emerging independent child of God. He sang many songs, but the one that first moved really inspired me was "An die Musik." Franz Schubert composed this song in March 1817 for solo voice and piano, with text from a poem by his friend Franz von Schober. It is a love song to Music. One English translation is:

Oh lovely Art, in how many grey hours,
When life's fierce orbit ensnared me,
Have you kindled my heart to warm love,
Carried me away into a better world!

How often has a sigh escaping from your harp,
A sweet, sacred chord of yours
Opened up for me the heaven of better
times,
Oh lovely Art, for that I thank you!

I was inspired by more than the song, but by the person who was singing it as well.

About 3 weeks before the concert I read Kelly's application for a scholarship from our church, in it he took some time to reflect on exactly why he needed the money. He shared that it was his dream to become a professional singer. A lofty dream.

Shortly after writing the checks for the scholarships, Camp Starfish came along and Phyllis and Lorenzo York did a short play for the campers where a child (Lorenzo) was practicing basketball and the mother (Phyllis) was doing everything she could to knock some common sense into the guy - that he was never going to amount to anything more than the rest of the family and to just give up this dream. Mom won eventually and the child walked away sad - and even though it was just an act by two grown-ups, I was so sad for that child, and knew the play struck a chord with the children there.

And then there I sat - listening to Kelly sing a love song to his dream and my heart was so moved - then as a closing song he totally did me in - he sang, "The Impossible Dream" from "Man of La Mancha," the story of the "mad" knight, Don Quixote, as a play within a play, performed by Cervantes and his fellow prisoners as he awaits a hearing with the Spanish Inquisition.

In the words of CERVANTES:

May I set the stage? I shall impersonate a man.
Come, enter into my imagination and see him!

His name... Alonso Quijana... a country squire, no longer young... bony, hollow-faced... eyes that burn with the
fire of inner vision.

Being retired, he has much time for books. He studies them from morn to night and often through the night
as well.

And all he reads oppresses him... fills him with indignation at man's murderous ways toward man. And he conceives the strangest project ever imagined... to become a knight-errant and sally forth into the world to right all wrongs. No longer shall he be plain Alonso Quijana... but a dauntless knight known as -
Don Quixote de La Mancha

So Kelly then closed his recital with the song which was sung all the way through once in the musical by Don Quixote as he stands vigil over his armor, in response to Aldonza (Dulcinea)'s question about what he means by "following the quest".

To dream ... the impossible dream ...
To fight ... the unbeatable foe ...
To bear ... with unbearable sorrow ...
To run ... where the brave dare not go ...
To right ... the unrightable wrong ...
To love ... pure and chaste from afar ...
To try ... when your arms are too weary ...
To reach ... the unreachable star ...

This is my quest, to follow that star ...
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far ...
To fight for the right, without question or
pause ...

To be willing to march into Hell, for a
Heavenly cause ...

And I know if I'll only be true, to this
glorious quest,
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm,
when I'm laid to my rest ...
And the world will be better for this:
That one man, scorned and covered with
scars,
Still strove, with his last ounce of courage,
To reach ... the unreachable star ...

And I felt that Kelly was singing it not only for himself as motivation for his coming quest in college - but that he was singing it for all humanity.

I have felt so often that my calling as a pastor was to struggle to not give up hope for the impossible, to believe that with time and persistence God's will, God's truth, God's justice will be done on earth - that God's love will prevail over all of humanity's weaknesses and selfish, destructive, unkind, behaviors.

And then I read today's sermon text, where it says, "18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." True confessions - I have never thought too clearly about this text. I understood what it meant - but I had never really envisioned what those words meant until I read an article on these texts by a man named Rick Morely. He pointed out that, "Gates are defensive in nature...So, when Jesus talks about his church struggling with the forces of evil, Jesus just assumes that the church will be on the offensive. He assumes that Hell will be counting on their gate, in defensive position. And when it does, that gate will not prevail." And then I heard the words in my mind "To be Willing to March into Hell for a heavenly Cause!"

Let's look at some of the other texts in this week's lectionary - imagine the courage and faith that Moses' unnamed mother had when she hid that child as long as she did and then set him lovingly free with the hopes that God would guide and protect her child. Then there is the courage of Miriam in following her brother in order to protect that child and her courage in stealthily bringing mother and child together. And let us not underestimate the courage of the Pharaoh's daughter in knowingly taking in such a child against her father's wishes. This is a tale of inch by inch, step by step, marching into hell for the sake of a child's life and justice for the Hebrew nation against the forces of cruelty and power. Not one of those players in this story knew exactly how their part would bring about the ultimate justice - but each looked at their choices and made heavenly decisions at each juncture. We don't need to know the end of the story when we are fighting against evil - in the words of Ron Buford, "Leave the "how" to God as you focus on your hope."

From our Epistle we see what the Old Testament story is reflecting. Each of the characters in the Moses story had a gift to offer justice, and together as a community they were transformed that they would know the will of God. "3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you

ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."

Mayor Corey Booker, of Newark is quoted as having said, "Don't speak to me about your religion; first show it to me in how you treat other people. Don't tell me how much you love your God; show me in how much you love all His children. Don't preach to me your passion for your faith; teach me through your compassion for your neighbors. In the end, I'm not as interested in what you have to tell or sell as I am in how you choose to live and give."

And wasn't that the point of Don Quixote? That he was an old country squire - feeble and seen as "mad" - and yet he was courageous and offered to those struggling around him visions of themselves as God sees them - not as humanity saw them. Squire Alonso Quijana became a courageous Moses - Don Quixote - for the oppressed people around him and ended his life with massive amounts of compassion focusing on truth and justice - focusing on the power of God.

There is another famous dreamer in the news these days. The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is being dedicated on August 28th in DC. I heard a report on NPR this morning when young African American kids were preparing for the trip to the Dedication ceremony and some spoke that they have never experienced racism that they are aware of, and yet to hear stories from their grandparents - who aren't even that old - like 60 - it is amazing to think of how many changes have occurred in such a short time.

In the summer of 1989 my husband and I were standing in West Germany looking over the border into the German Democratic Republic wondering if we would ever be able to go over there - imagine the shock when just months later the wall fell. Justice is occurring - and we can't see the whole picture - we just see bits and pieces at a time. Moses' mother was only thinking of saving her son's life, not that he would save the Israelites. Each player in the story was a gift that each person played, not knowing the whole outcome, each dealing the best they can with the challenge in front of them.

Many people are facing adventures in faith these days. There are those students getting ready to return to the structured life of academics - either in new places or old - each new beginning has hope, and our prayers are with them all.

Our church is facing an adventure - how can we find ways to share the joy and talents that we have with those who might be enriched by the love and insights we have to offer in worshipping our God? How can we make sure that those who are already a part of our community do not feel left out? Well, we are taking our steps, bit by bit, as we know them to be true, and we won't forget the words of Ron Buford, "Leave the "how" to God as you focus on your hope." AMEN