

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 12th 2017

With apologies to the author(s) of Deuteronomy, I have re-phrased the sermon by Moses for my fellow Americans in 2017 in terms that make more sense to me:

Fellow citizens – listen to me. We live in luxury unimagined in ancient times. We have access to untold material wealth, we move about our country with an ease unheard of even fifty years ago, we do not want for food, or clothing, material goods, or entertainment. We did nothing to deserve this – we just happened to be born in a great time in human history and in a great place. Our country has sufficient natural resources to provide for its people for centuries, if not millennia. We have the gift of leisure and the time and resources to enjoy it.

And yet – there are some of our fellow citizens who do not have the shelter or food or basic goods the rest of us enjoy. We also have sisters and brothers in other lands who suffer greatly. Why can't we find a way to raise them up without lowering our own standards? Can't we devise a way to share more fully this bounty we enjoy? Have we forgotten that we won the lottery of history in being born in this time and place of plenty? Is it so hard to think of others as we enjoy our good fortune? Are we so attached (entitled) to things that we forget about people who do not have what we do? Most of us profess to be religious – can we not see the hand of God in all the goodness we have received? If Moses walked among us today he would remind us that because we have been so blessed we should love God with all our hearts, and all our souls, and all our strength. If Jesus was walking among us He would remind us that showing that love is as simple as trying to ease the burden of those who are least among us.

Jesus expresses some exasperation with the disciples when they were unable to drive out the demon due to their lack of faith. I can't help but think of the scene from Star Wars (the very first movie in the series from 40 years ago) where Luke is studying under the Jedi master Yoda. Yoda strives to help Luke master the force so he can use it to combat evil. After a period of time practicing the use of the force – moving objects, anticipating what another will do, analyzing thoughts and motives of others – Yoda challenges Luke to move a spaceship. Luke is unable to do so, and then Yoda demonstrates he can do it easily. In awe Luke exclaims “I don't believe it.” And Yoda replies “That is why you fail.” The disciples failed in their quest due to their lack of faith – they didn't believe they could do what was asked of them. Jesus reminds them of the power of faith with a visual they could understand – faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain.

Are we called to move mountains? Probably not. But are we called to believe in the face of difficulties? Yes, precisely in those times and those difficulties that might seem like mountains. It is easy to believe when things are going well. It is easy to be faith-filled when we aren't challenged.

But when things happen that shake our faith, we have to dig deeper and find a core from which we can draw strength. For each of us these situations are different – one person's molehill is another's mountain. But for all of us we can take strength from knowing (believing, having faith) that a loving God is there to be with us when times are difficult.

And so my prayer today is twofold – first, to be more detached from and generous with the bounty that I have received, and second, to be more aware of the power of faith when I am in times of distress.

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