

“Knots and All”

Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 66:1-18

July 4, 2010

Experience is said to be a good teacher. Some swear by it (nothing beats experience). And, in some ways, that’s true. Experience does teach many lessons in life. But experience also falls short, at least in one area. Experience cannot guarantee that we will draw the correct conclusion. Lessons are taught, to be sure. But not always do we learn what we are supposed to learn. Case in point:

Years ago I was asked to perform a funeral for a young girl whose father had killed her and him. Based on that experience the mother came up with a conclusion that God allowed her daughter to die. That somehow, for some reason she (the mother) was being punished.

Too often people draw conclusions about God from experience. Who is to say that the lessons learned are accurate? When experience is the only measuring stick – the stick varies greatly. You and I can have the same experience and yet draw a different conclusion based on that experience. You may conclude that God is a merciful God and I may conclude that God is an angry, vengeful God.

I am not saying that experience is wrong or even not to be valued. Nor am I saying we cannot or should not learn from experience. What I am saying is that there is more to God than what we experience. And our experience isn’t that accurate of a measuring stick.

I believe experience gets in the way most often when we use it to measure God’s presence and will. When we experience troublesome times, we often question God’s presence. We may even doubt God’s presence or will for our lives. When experience is opposite of what we have come to believe all too often the result is that we begin to doubt our faith in God. Never do we look at how we draw our conclusions. To know only hate, judgment, or abuse we begin to wonder if God is gracious at all. When such things run rampant we question if God is present anywhere? Such questioning can lead to confusion, doubt, even despair. These are times when experience becomes misleading. We draw the wrong conclusion. We learn the wrong spiritual truths (i.e. forgetting we live in a broken world). We cannot see how God works in and through such brokenness.

I have a friend who is a master weaver. Her skills and talent are at the highest level and her work is extraordinary. I was given an opportunity to view her loom and to watch her weave. The thread she used was filled with knots (blemishes, if you will). When I asked her about the knots she told me they are there on purpose. She likes to use such thread for its texture and varied effect.

As I watched I looked closely at the knots. Thread by thread the weaving came together. The knots, so obvious at first, slowly helped bring the weaving together. Its texture, its look, and its overall design, was magnificent, *knots and all*.

The knots in the thread reminded me of life’s experiences. They represent all the difficult times we face. They reminded me of things done and things left undone. For some of us, the knots are larger and tighter than they are for others. It becomes easy for us to focus on them. Sometimes, it’s all we can see (the knots). The conclusion we draw is that God seems absent in other lives, that they do not

live in accord with God's will, or to believe in God is a foolish thing and a sign of weakness. After all, look at the size of those knots!

What experience doesn't tell us is hidden behind the knots is a master weaver. The weaver doesn't remove the knots, but keeps them, in full view, using them to create a beautiful weaving we call our life. With an open heart, study of God's Word, and remaining in the community of faith we are more likely to draw the correct conclusion to our experience, and that God remains in our lives, *knots and all!*

It is not the absence of the knots that determines God's presence. Instead, it is God's promise to be here that determines God's presence. God's promise, known through history as being faithful, a promise kept whether we see it or not, is experienced, just not always as we might assume. Not knowing this, we could draw the wrong conclusion. By remaining in community with the church, through continued study of God's Word, and thrusting more in what we believe than what we see we, will discover this truth about God.

One who had learned that God is present knots and all wrote the Psalm. He discovered that God's activity, regardless of experience, was known both in judgment and grace:

*Come and see what God has done; □
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.
For you, O God, have tested us; □
you have tried us as silver is tried.
But truly God has listened; □
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.*

This saving activity does not deny that sin exists (the knots). Nor does it dismiss them as if they simply go away. The sin in our lives (the knots) is visible for all to see. It remains with us and is part of the thread we call life. God knows them and names them (judgment). God also forgives and removes their power to destroy us (grace). Each of us (*knots and all*) is woven into one tapestry (Body of Christ). It varies in texture and form. And it is made beautiful by the master weaver and not by us (the knotty thread).

So when we experience life in ways that seem inconsistent with the Gospel, when we see one another act in ways we don't think fit the Christian life, and when our knots appear so large we cannot see anything else, we need to remember who is doing the weaving.

We do not excuse sin. But neither do we use it as a measurement of worth or proof of God's presence or absence. Our worth is founded on God's love, love that accepts us, *knots and all!*

AMEN