

19th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 23 – Year A – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony-10-11-2020

Isaiah 25:1-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:1-0, Matthew 22:1-14

Isaiah, the prophet of our first reading this morning is often spoken of as the prophet of hope. It is to hope that I want to turn your attention today. It is difficult to hope without the assurance that what we hope for has the possibility, even the likelihood of coming to pass. The hope I want to consider is not that childish kind that is akin to wishing. I hope/wish it would snow or I hope for a new bicycle. It is not even the kind of hope that many have that the Mariners will have a winning season. This is theological hope, the hope we have in the goodness and care of God.

All hope of the theological kind begins with hope in God and God's promises to humankind. As such it begins with an examination of the past, an acknowledgement of what is now and a sense that God is present in the midst of our situations and is working to bring about a change, and end to the present pain and difficulty in our lives. It is this hope that we are in sore need of now. If we cannot be aware of the circumstances of the past and of the present reality we cannot see clearly how God is at work in the world. It is this three-fold sense of where we dwell, past, present and future that presents us with a larger picture, beyond ourselves to God's design.

I remember one particular Thanksgiving when I was a teenager. We always had lots of people as part of any holiday. My mother loved to cook and for days before she would prepare for the feast. This particular Thanksgiving the guest list kept growing. There was always room for one or two more at my parent's table. That year we had to have the dinner around the ping pong table as it was the only space large enough to accommodate everyone. We ate, we told stories, we shared our lives and we left with a sense of wellbeing and trust in the future. A sense of hopefulness.

The image of a banquet, a feast of thanksgiving has long been the scriptural image of God in action in the world. It is what Isaiah is depicting "a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear." This is the image of a God who is engaged with God's people and who doesn't worry about chlorestal. This is a God who is the very description of abundance. It is that abundance, that engagement that, that extravagance that we can hope for in our lives.

The past months have been difficult and the immediate future seems to hold more of the same. We are living with the uncertainty and fear. The need to be careful, wear masks, social distance, wash hands, sanitize and all the rest leads us to wonder if our lives will ever get back to normal. It is easy to lose hope to feel like all of the good and joy is gone. It is in these times that patience and a steady vision of the community, of you and your neighbors is hope filled. It is the hope that life can be rekindled and that we can come to that feast remembering that this is the image of God's action in our lives.

We are beginning the second week of this year's Stewardship program. The theme of light in a dark time was chosen intentionally by the Vestry and agreed to by the Stewardship committee to remind us as a parish community that hope is still alive and well at St. Augustine's. We can look at the past achievements of this parish, by the many who have gone before and the many who

continue to this day. In remembering we know that God has been with us and continues to walk beside us. We can, in this time in which we are living, recognize the courageous patience that is being called forth from all of us to endure and more than endure to thrive. This time is a time to rekindle our faith, our vision for the future and what is to be according to God's design for us.

We are not here to lie fallow until the end of this phase of life called COVID-19. We are here to dig deeply into our hearts, minds and resources to be ready for the time to come, that time of joy, and feasting that will be again. Now is the time to prepare, to have that steady vision and for each of us recommit to this place and the ministry that is here.

The hope that is in God and God's presence with us is a hope that comes from faith and trust that we are not abandoned. The feast that is to come is already here. We have this place, we have the community, we have the potential for great ministry into the future. The time to begin is now. To paraphrase another, No matter how desperate the circumstances one starts from, a powerful vision for a better tomorrow can take hold. A powerful vision is what is called for in this moment. First, simply offer praise and thanks to God for the good that is here now. Next, remember the times when God has been faithful to you and this place in the past. Look for signs and evidence that God is at work in our midst and finally expect to see God continue to work in your life and the life of this place into the future.

Experience for yourselves that feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. Expect the blessing promised by God. The blessing that is ours because we wait for God that God might save us, might encourage us, might give us hope for the future. Know that you have within yourselves the steadfast vision, the prayerful courage and the patience to weather this storm. There is a better day coming and we are called to prepare for it now so that we will be ready to receive the blessings that God has in store for us.