

September 21, 2014 – 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Prepared by Sr. Luise Ahrens, MM, Cambodia

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Matthew 20:1-16

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” Isaiah 55:8

Today’s readings give us one clear hard fact to explore: “God’s not our kind of folks,” a confession, or lament, that comes from a black woman of great faith who looks at the Bible and at the world around her. (*God on our minds*, Liturgical Press, 1982) Amazingly enough, God is not made in my image and likeness but rather we, we hope, are made in God’s.

The first reading gives us the clue about what is coming. Isaiah 55:8-9 says: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

“God’s not our kind of folks” rings true when we look at the world around us. God is, as we see in the Bible, “other.” In Matthew, chapter 5, the Beatitudes do not image a God who is like us: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” The passage does not read: How happy are you, you with your comfortable Christian life. No, what God calls happiness seems to be out of reach: to be gentle, merciful, and pure in heart, a fighter for justice.

The psalmist picks up this difference between us and God but as a fact, a reality to be praised. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.” (Psalm 145:3) Recognizing the very other-ness of God, God’s greatness is something for which we are called to give thanks. We cannot know God in all of God’s magnificence but we do know, once again from the psalm, that “[t]he Lord is near to all who call ... who call on him in truth.” In our lives every single day, there are gifts and challenges that turn us to God, to call out for help, to give thanks, to lament or to rejoice. The only need for we who are called Christians is that we turn to God.

The gospel reading is the clearest example of God’s difference from us. Each of us has read that gospel and felt a clear identity with the workers who had been out in the fields (or on the construction site, or in the garment factory) for the entire day. They were standing in line for their wages, seeing the reward given to the latecomers and thinking to themselves: Surely I will get more; I deserve it more than these folks who came in the last hour of work. And yet, the owner gives them the same amount, the same amount as I who have worked so hard! What does this say about me? What does it say about the owner of the field?

It speaks about me: In the world of work, I expect to receive what is due to me—to do my work, get my salary and maybe even a bonus at the end of the year. Do I feel that way in my spiritual life? Do I expect God to daily punish my weakness my frailty, my sin, do I hope for “justice” in this realm as well, getting back what I have given? Probably not – rather, each of us hopes for,

prays for, the unbounded generosity of God to cover our sins with love and forgiveness, to manifest the unbounded generosity we expect in our God.

In Cambodia where I live and work, we have a project that prevents HIV transmission from mother to child, and it works: the children are free of the virus. The old wisdom said that HIV negative children of HIV positive women should not nurse, but most new research says that if new mothers are on the drugs and if they have good nutrition, 95 percent of children will not get AIDS from nursing. We can provide powdered milk for \$26,000 per year. What more can we do for these mothers if that money is not spent on prevention against a five percent chance of contracting AIDS? We struggle with these questions, and we struggle as well with those of life-saving but very expensive surgeries for some very poor people: How much do we spend to save the one? How much is left in the pot for the many?

These are our kind of limits – of resources, of choices – and they are real, but God is not like us. There is no limit on God, or on God’s love. As the owner of the field says to the complaining workers, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” Our task is to trust in God’s love for each one of us, not limiting God to our puny stature but rejoicing in the God whose generosity fills us again and again to overflowing, pressed down and running over.

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