

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Isaiah 49: 14-15

Psalm 62: 2-3, 6-7, 8-9

1 Corinthians 4: 1-5

Matthew 6: 24-34

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How often have we heard someone say, especially after some failure or disappointment, "That's the story of my life?" Our life, especially when we look back on it, can seem very much like a story.

In one of Kurt Vonnegut's novels, Kilgore Trout complains to an acquaintance, "Honestly, Bill, the way things are going, all I can think of, is that I'm a character in a book by somebody who wants to write about somebody who suffers all the time." Of course, the irony of that statement is that Kilgore Trout, is, in fact, such a fictional character. Nevertheless, there are difficult times in our lives when we can readily identify with the sentiments he expresses.

On the other hand, in an early notebook, G. K. Chesterton writes,
"We must certainly be in a novel;
What I like about this novelist is that he takes
Such trouble about his minor characters."

On our better days, these words by Chesterton may come closer to expressing our view of our life stories.

Which of these interpretations of human experience is true? Are we pawns of a malevolent fate, or are we the treasured creations of a kindly author of life? In our Gospel, Jesus gives us the answer. After offering, in evidence, the birds of the sky and the grasses of the field, Jesus tells us, "Your heavenly Father knows what you need." Seek first

God's sovereignty over you, seek God's way of holiness, and all good things will be given you besides.

When we are gathered together in Sunday worship, we can all agree with Jesus' words -- God does have a loving, saving plan for each of us. But when we are out there struggling against life's difficulties, our sentiments can sometimes be better expressed in the words of Gideon to the angel: "Forgive me my lord, but if God is with us, then why is all this happening to us now?" (Judges 6: 13) Our prayer might even be that of the flustered minister who in a time of natural disaster declared from the pulpit, "Let us hope that a kind providence will put a speedy end to the acts of God under which we have been laboring."

Of course, the truth of the matter is that we have to learn to trust God -- to believe that no matter what the circumstances, God's loving care for us will prevail. The best analogy for the confidence we need, is the love and trust that a young child feels for its parents. This may be part of what Jesus means when he says we must become child-like in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In one of my favorite Peanuts cartoons, Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "The best feeling in the world is when you are riding with your parents in a car at night, and you know that you are loved, and nothing can possibly go wrong. Your parents know where you are going, and you will arrive there safely. And Charlie Brown replies, "Yes, and you know that one day the feeling will be gone, and you will never ever feel that safe again."

It's a sad cartoon, but I like it, because I remember the feeling. When I was a child, back in the days before seat belts and child safety seats, my favorite place for long rides at night was in the back seat on the floor. There was a big hump in the middle of the floor, where the

transmission passed under the car, but if I curled up, I could fit nicely on one side. (Cars were larger in those days, and I was smaller.) There on the floor I could feel the vibration of the tires on the road and the rhythm of the engine, and I could hear the drone of my parent's conversation. They would be speaking quietly, thinking that I was asleep. And if I stood up and peaked over the seat back, I could see their faces outlined in the dash board light, and follow the hypnotic red dot at the end of my father's cigarette.....

That's the kind of trust we need to place in God. That may be what we were seeking when we used to pray at every Mass that God would protect us from all anxiety as we waited for the coming of our Savior.

And the love and trust we felt as children, however imperfect, and wherever obtained, gives us the ability to place the same kind of trust in God -- in the knowledge that the love parents feel for their children is only a shadow of the love that God lavishes on each of us.

But can we make such an outrageous claim in the face of the problems and suffering that threaten to overwhelm our world and ourselves? Yes we can. The claim is outrageous, but we can make it -- just as a little girl can claim that her mother is the smartest, most beautiful woman in the world, and her father is the strongest, most handsome man in the world -- when to an objective observer the evidence suggests otherwise. In faith and love we can know things that may not be obvious when we weigh the evidence. Like the little girl, we are not "objective" about those we love, and we love God.

And so we trust, like we did at our first swimming lesson, when we dared to let go of the edge of the pool. We trust, like we did when we let

our father convince us that we really ought to let the doctor stick that needle in our backside. We trust, like we did when we had the chicken pox, and our mother assured us that in a few days the spots would go away and we would feel fine.

God, in Jesus Christ, has made promises to us, promises we read in our Gospel today. And in our love for God, in our faith, we know that God's promises will be kept. We trust that God's Word is true. That's the story of our life.