

It starts with a fundamental belief about life itself, our Christian faith does. Our Jewish forbearers gave us this gift upon which our Christianity rests. And that Christian foundational belief is this: that God is good, that creation is good, and that humans, while flawed, nonetheless contain within them something that animals do not.

Call it memory, reason and skill, as one of our Eucharistic prayers does, or call it a heart of flesh, rather than a heart of stone, as does one of the Old Testament prophets. Call it the ability to hear an inner voice of wisdom that says, said, to Abram, if you leave life as you know it and journey forth, I will be with you.

However we find faith, whatever in Christianity speaks to us, *all* of it rests on the foundational belief that God is good and that creation is good and that we humans are somehow, uniquely different from salamanders or elk or seals or elephants. And, this is important: that our differences from the rest of creation has implications.

We can, in any situation, choose to go with the animal instinct side of things, *or* we can choose to the memory, reason, skill, hearts of flesh,-made-in-the-image- of-God side of things. And our faith rests on the idea that it matters which we choose. God, we believe, wants us to make the choice that draws us closer to the wonder of it all.

Looking back over the history of the human race, it seems apparent that when we choose the animal instinct survive-at-all- cost side of the choice, things like greed and violence take the upper hand. Wars happen. Infidelity happens. Murder happens. Life might be great for the few who hold power, but for the rest, it is hard and ugly. In our foundational story, no one knew this better than the Jews.

And yet, in the midst of their captivity in Babylon, it is then that they write up the story that has driven their life together for generations. The creation story that begins Genesis was written smack dab in the middle of a time of hardship and loss for the people of Israel. I love that. It is one of my top ten favorite things about the Bible. Right in the middle of one of the biggest messes ever to face them, the Jewish people chose to tell a bigger story. It was the story of a God who was good, a good God who created good things, a God who made us humans to be a little different, capable of better things, than animal instinct and the battle for the survival-of-the-fittest.

In many ways, our faith, our ability to trust in God, and out of that trust, to trust in the teachings of Jesus, fall directly out of our ability to grab onto and hold fast to this foundational truth of our tradition. That God is good, that creation is good, that life itself is a good gift. And that we humans, blessed as we are with memory, reason, skill and hearts of flesh, have a choice to make.

Do we buy it, or not? As individuals, where do we cast our trust- on the side of life as gift to be received and cherished, or do we think of life as battle, to be fought and won, no-holds-barred? And then, once that choice is made, there is another choice to make given what we trust to be true, how will we live our lives? What will we do, as the poet Mary Oliver puts it, with the one wild and precious life we have been given by God?

It's a pretty big project we are invited into, life is.

Well, we know which side of the choice Jesus came down on. He's for the life is good and holy and our lives, in particular, are meant to be good and holy too. The way we live, the choices we make, the things we do with our time and our energy, Jesus invites, are to be directed to the life-is good-and-holy side of things rather than the animal-instinct side of things.

In a nutshell, that is what we might call our faith. Faith as the trust, and the acts that we engage in because of that trust; that God is good, life is good and that we as humans have the opportunity to echo God's goodness in the choices we make and the way we live our lives.

But oh my, what a difficult choice it can be to stick to!

We know enough now about the brain to know that we still have a bit of animal instinct in us. That's part of our tradition too—the story of Jews who slip into that animal greed and power trip and do very bad things. Even very good people, like King David. And, of course, it still happens. Just look at the world around us.

So, what's a faithful person to do? Well, Jesus had some good things to teach us about that. Jesus used new language to talk about the fundamental goodness of God, and of God's desire for us to participate in that goodness. He called it the kingdom of heaven, right? And he also taught us somethings about participation in the kingdom. Generally speaking, what Jesus taught about the kingdom is that it included other people, and our relationship with the rest of the world.

And, today, in today's Gospel reading, he teaches us something else, and it is this: To participate in the kingdom of heaven requires that we prepare. In today's reading he tells his flock, that's them and that's us: to be dressed and ready, because the kingdom can happen any old time at all.

Now, I know I don't have to tell you that being dressed and ready has nothing to do with the clothes you wore to church today. That rather, it has to do with something much more important. It has to do with our decision to trust that God is good and that creation is good. It has to do with our belief that we humans are somehow involved in a story as old as the

universe. That life isn't random, that it has a trajectory. It has to do with our decision to trust that we are actually *created* to have a relationship to God that is intimate and life-giving.

And this clothing, this being ready and dressed, has to do with everything we do, from our end of things, to foster that relationship with God. It has to do with understanding that in order for God to give us tastes of that beauty called the kingdom of heaven, we need to be seeking God with our mind, with strength, and with a heart longing to believe that there is more to life than animal instinct, and greed and violence. A heart that believes that if we seek the kingdom, we will find ourselves in it. That if we knock, that little by little, the door will be opened.

So, its Sunday, a new day and a new week. What are you going to do with your one wild and precious life? Earlier prayed these words with the psalmist:

*Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.*

How are you going to live that hope? What are you going to do to knock on the door of the kingdom? What clothes will you put on to be dressed and ready for the kingdom's appearance in your own life?

What are you going to do with your one wild and precious life, as you live today in this wild and oh so precious world?