

‘Got Faith?’  
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper  
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based on Psalm 133 and Matthew 15:21-28

Today is Favorite Hymn Sunday. What are two of your favorite hymns that can serve as a prayer?

1. Here I Am Lord
2. Holy, Holy, Holy

Amen.

I had a meeting last week and as has happened many times over the last few days, the conversation turned to the unrest and division in our country.

She said, “I just don’t know our world anymore. What’s happening?”

I can honestly say, “I don’t know.” But if I stop to really think about it ... I suspect the unrest and division in our world is caused by an underlying anxiety caused by too much information ... and about too little faith.

There is now so much news to process it’s impossible to go through the day without being instilled with fear and trembling. I’m not convinced it’s has to do with the quality of information as much as it does the quantity of information. We simply don’t have time or brain space to recover from one anxious bit of information until another one is layered over the top of it.

Anxiety piles up on top of anxiety. That contributes to unrest and division.

But I’m also convinced our world is faced with a crisis of faith. Our world is so complicated; so diverse; so multi-faceted we don’t have the ability to sort it all out. We struggle to draw the kind of conclusions we need to in order to cultivate unity and peace and end up relying more on information than we do on faith.

If you read through the Study Guide scripture readings last week you came across Psalm 133. It’s short and sweet ... 3 verses long. It’s a psalm, or hymn (if you will), about kindred living together in unity and it is there we find the Lord’s blessing: life forevermore.

Psalm 133 has been a favorite hymn of eons of faithful disciples of the Lord. In this favorite hymn, God’s ordained blessing to live forevermore is found in the children of God living together in unity.

We need to sing that every day, don’t we? We need to remind ourselves unity within humankind is possible! And not only possible, but ordained by God’s blessing.

... and that kind of unity is a byproduct of great faith.

With that in mind, what are three more of your favorite hymns? (please stand)

1. There is a Balm in Gilhead
2. Victory in Jesus

My youngest grandson learned at a very young age how much was “a lot”. “A lot” always meant more than whatever it was his big brother had.

He learned early that “a lot” was better than “a little” and more was better than less. How does that happen? My grandson isn’t unique. Society conditions us to believe more is better than less. Whatever happened to the saying, “less is more”?

Then I think ... maybe to live together in unity means we stop bickering over who has more (more power, more status, more privilege, more money) and concern ourselves more with who has less. That way, those with less can have more ... and unity is achieved.

Doesn’t that make sense? In that way ... more is learning to live with less.

What we have to do as faith-full Jesus followers is to redefine ‘more’.

‘More’ becomes a way that leads to things that build up rather than tear down. ‘More’ becomes a form of God’s abundance and whose crumbs are enough to nourish and feed the soul.

‘More’ should never lead to things that destroy or undermine ... especially if we’re talking about faith. ‘More’ should help us gain great faith, not less faith.

Let’s pray about that with another favorite hymn:

1. You Are Mine
2. Shout to the Lord

Today’s scripture reading is about ‘more’ and ‘less’. It’s about a bold and bodacious woman with *more* than enough moxie to confront Jesus. This unnamed Canaanite woman who every single one of the disciples would have considered “less than” ends up not only receiving what she asked for ... but more ... God’s blessing: life forevermore.

It took a bold, persistent woman to redefine ‘more’ by pointing out ‘less’. She asked for a lot, but knew enough that all she needed could be satisfied with just a crumb.

In today’s reading we are led to believe ‘more’ meant the food, or spiritual nourishment, for God’s chosen children. ‘Less’ meant the crumbs leftover.

But leave it to Jesus to turn this story on its ear. It turns out in this beautiful story of God’s unifying and saving grace ... ‘more’ deprived a person; and ‘less’ ultimately saved a person.

In this incredible story of faith, an outcast like this Gentile Canaanite woman proves the greatness of God’s grace unifies even an outcast, unclean, subordinate female is worthy of God’s ordained blessing of life forevermore.

The very crumb the woman demanded was enough to not only save her daughter, but define the difference between “little” and “great” faith; “less” and “more” grace; and re-define the relationship between Jesus and the world.

In this story, the world of unrest and division is united by an example of great faith.

The ancient favorite hymn Psalm 133 helps us see how very good and pleasant it is to know God loves the lowly sinner so much ... so great ... that ‘more’ is turned into ‘less’ and humanity can be saved from a life of unrest and division.

Our country has had much to think about since the riot in Charlottesville. The church has also had much to think and pray about. We have all been confronted with our lack of conversation around issues of race.

If nothing else, we have been rudely awakened by the hate and bigotry that exists in our world that exposes unrest and division in a very ugly way.

As a country, and as The United Methodist Church, we have been lured into a false

belief race relations have become normalized and accepted since the 1960's. But clearly, that is not the case. Not even close.

I have been known to brag about how Covenant is a diverse and blended congregation who puts Jesus at the fore front of our relationships with one another.

Covenant sits in prime real estate that has the capacity to host fruitful and hopeful conversation about race. Our neighborhood demographic *invites* us into that kind of conversation!

Are we willing to help nurture it? Are we able to not only read Psalm 133 as a precious metaphor for God's love for us but to also inspire us to act accordingly? Can we read the story of the bold and bodacious woman and sit idle?

Do we have the kind of great faith that can turn a conversation about 'more' and 'less' on its ear?

I know we have "a lot" on our plate moving forward into the future.

I also know we have "more" than enough to survive both spiritually and financially.

But what I know most is that the more time we put toward confronting the injustices of our day and reflecting the love of Jesus Christ, the less we will become anxious and paralyzed by today's current events.

The very best way to normalize the uncertainties of life is to allow God, through Jesus, to measure the greatness of our faith.

In that way, everyone including the bold and bodacious mother, her daughter ... and our world ... will be healed.

Let us close with two of your favorite hymns...

1. How Great Thou ART
2. It Is Well With My Soul

Amen.