

Letting go ... Not letting go...

Most of us are familiar with the expression “Let go and let God.” It is not a biblical quote, but is based upon biblical principles. We know Jesus encourages us not to be anxious, to seek first God’s kingdom, to depend upon God’s love. The quote originated with Alcoholics Anonymous founded in 1935, and may be attributed to one of the founders, an Episcopal Priest.

Those working through addictions can teach all of us valuable lessons about letting go – of control, of guilt, of expectations, of hurts or perceived slights. We all need to let go from time to time. Even when it comes to our schedules, our time commitments, our daily activities. God teaches us to let go as God rests on the 7th day of creation. The Sabbath, and Sabbath time, is a letting go of our need to control time, control others. Letting go is an important part of our spiritual, emotional and physical lives.

But today’s lessons are all about “not letting go”, perseverance, persistence, holding tight to what really matters. Some years ago at a wedding a priest told the bride and groom, “It’s important to learn what you need to remember, and what you need to forget.” The same might be true when it comes to those things we hold on to and those that we let go of.

Jacob, of course, is the Biblical example of not letting go. He wrestles with an angel of God, perhaps God himself. He won’t let go until he has received a blessing. And he receives a new name, Israel, the one who has wrestled, “striven” with God. This unique relationship has defined the Jewish people to this day. Their steadfast belief in God’s providence has sustained them through exile, oppression, holocaust and war. Of course, in modern politics, the nation of Israel has to constantly discern what they need to hold onto and to what they need to let go of.

Paul encourages his young colleague, Timothy, to hold on to the teaching, the faith passed on to him. Too many people will let go and turn to false truths, false teachers, myths. Timothy is called to teach the truth of the faith in Jesus with patience “whether the time is favorable or unfavorable...” He is to convince, rebuke, encourage. This is what we are called to in our own day – with our children, with our teenagers, with our adults. It is the call to the parents, Godparents, grandparents of this young child we baptize today at 11:15. Teaching letting go and not letting go is our mission as a parish in not just our Christian education ministries, but in all we do.

Finally, in today’s Gospel we see Jesus’ parable about the persistent widow demanding justice. This persistence is a model for faith. Jesus held on to God’s love even through the shame, agony and pain of the cross. What will we hold on to in our time of deepest challenge?

It does sometimes feel like we are wrestling with God. Where are you God? What are you doing God? The answers don’t seem to come. There does not seem to be a way forward. It’s dark, maybe even depressing. Stress replaces hope, negativity overcomes the promise. Many feel this way in our nation right now because of the Presidential campaign.

At these very moments we are to hold on to God’s love for us, God’s promises for us, God’s work for us. We, too, are called, like Jacob, like Timothy, like the widow to persevere, persist, to hold on.