

Many of you are probably aware that last month, America celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, when two astronauts landed and walked on the moon. Such a commemoration brought out all kinds of documentaries and other sorts of programs, books, and articles remembering the historic event and conjecturing what is next for our space exploration program. I am interested in all kinds of human exploration endeavors, including the exploration of outer space, the planets and moon, and there was so much information to take in, I could have easily overdosed on content; there is always so much to learn.

One of the documentaries I enjoyed watching and learned a lot from was PBS's *Chasing the Moon*, which aired for two hours on three consecutive nights. The final episode uncomfortably began with the criticism of the American space program and the missions to the moon. One woman on the documentary said she thought the whole thing was "disgusting" and wished America could "find something better to do." Others pointed out the many problems on the surface of the earth, things- sadly- we are all too familiar with today: systemic racism, sexism, poverty and violence. Apollo 8 astronaut Frank Borman reported that when he visited college campuses instead of being welcomed with questions about his mission that orbited the moon, he was met with protestors and criticisms that the space program was taking money away from others who needed it more. The documentary even showed protestors who came to the launch of Apollo 11 and gave a speech saying the technological advances were all well and good, but until every American was equal and well fed, it was nothing more than a waste. The head of NASA came out and met with protestors and said if not launching Apollo 11 that day would be the one thing that solved all of humanities injustices, he wouldn't do it. But he knew that would not be the case. Instead, he went on to say, perhaps by witnessing humanity achieve the impossible, maybe everyone on earth would be more inspired to work together to create a better life for everyone here on earth.

What the protestors and critics didn't know, and many of us didn't know until the publication of a book in 2016 by Margot Lee Shatterly titled *Hidden Figures*, was what was happening in NASA behind the astronauts and the white men in black horn-rimmed glasses, white shirts, narrow black ties and pocket protectors in mission control. Shatterly's book, which was also made into a movie, brought to our collective attention the diversity of the people employed by NASA to get fellow human beings to the moon and back, particularly the women of color like Katherine Johnson who by sharing their skills and abilities to execute complicated theoretical mathematical

calculations more accurately than the machine available at the time not only helped with the space program, they also began to chip away at unjust practices like segregation by exposing how ridiculous ideas like racism and sexism are because such things can get in the way of being part of the human race and achieving common goals by interfering with team work.

Since Shatterly's book came out, other historians have brought other minorities who worked in the space program to light. Including playwright George D. Morgan who wrote about his mother the rocket scientist who in the 1950's and 60's led the team that developed the fuel for the rockets that launched satellites and astronauts into space.

These historians are exposing a truth about major endeavors like space exploration, that when we all come together and work together to achieve a common goal, some of the very excuses the critics give for not working toward such goals can actually melt away, because steps toward equality were actually achieved. Alleluia. Thanks be to God.

This glimpse of the reality of the Kingdom of God may be what Jesus was talking about in today's Gospel lesson that begins with Jesus giving the most frequently given command in the Bible: Do not be afraid. More than the command to love, more than the command to care for the poor, more than the command to give alms, speakers in the Bible, be they angels or prophets or Jesus himself most often told us human beings to not be afraid. Today, one week after yet another mass shooting, this one only two and a half hours from here in Dayton, these are words we perhaps need to hear again to remind us of how we can respond to acts intended to make us angry and fearful of each other: do not be afraid. Fear divides. Fear hurts. Fear takes life and does not give it. Fear can make us grab for what we believe is ours to treasure. Remember, as the fictional character from *The Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise Capt. Jack Sparrow wisely says, "Not all treasure is silver and gold." For some their treasure may be the illusion of power, prestige, privilege. It might be using people instead of respecting people in order to feel superior to them. And because hearts and treasure go together, as we heard Jesus say, when what we treasure appears to be threatened, fear can be an all too common response, that is when harm can happen, and hope can be lost.

Fear stands counter to the faith that can be seen as a common thread in all of our readings today, especially in the parables Jesus told about how we are to live our faith, being ready for his return by sharing what we have instead of fighting to hold onto it or withhold resources.

I am sure many of us here today have heard this passage used to inspire financial giving to the church, and that is not a wrong interpretation. The truth is parishes like ours cannot do the good works we do and share our resources like our building, music program, free lunch, prayer shawls, and worship services without financial contributions. I cannot help people who are behind on their utility bills or other financial needs without generous support to my discretionary fund. My salary would not be met without the support of the Diocese' campus ministry grant fund. And we could not operate our coffee shop ministry without the generosity of the bishop as well as those of us who purchase coffee and tea from CrossRoads Café.

But just as our new thrift shop ministry needs other kinds of donations besides money, there are other kinds of treasure we can share, and deeper ways of looking at Jesus' words about what we treasure and the condition of our hearts. For the space program, it was women like Katharine Johnson who shared her mathematical skills. She explained in countless interviews how that work was part of her, her heart, something she loved and loved being a part of. It was her treasure, and by sharing her heart with NASA and teams of other mathematicians, engineers, pilots, and the rest of the NASA team, impossibilities like space travel became possible and unjust practices like segregation began to melt away. We all have something to share and we are called by God to share what we have in order to live into the gift Jesus said it is God's pleasure to have already given us: The Kingdom of God. The Resurrection life that has moved far beyond fear to be a way of showing God's amazing love and real presence to the world, a world that can sometimes be so filled with fear it can forget that forgiveness and healing are real, that endings, even tragic ones, like Jesus' crucifixion, are really new beginnings, that the love, joy and beauty of God are intended for all of us to share. There is more than enough of God's love for everyone regardless of race, age, gender, color, sexual orientation, skill level, wellness, socio-economic status and all the other ways we try to divide and conquer each other.

Just as we often hear Jesus words about selling what we have as giving our money away, we can hear the parables he told in today's Gospel as a warning to stay ready, waiting quietly and patiently for his return, when the world will be made right. And when that wonderful day happens, then we act, then we will work with Jesus in that beautiful world of equality and hope. But that may not be what Jesus said. Jesus told a parable of people looking not inward at themselves and remembering the good ol' days or arguing about who deserves which portion of the household budget, but outward, watching for signs of their master. These aren't parables about quietly waiting behind locked doors until something happens, they are parables about opening the door, looking out, and being present. That is what we followers of Jesus are called to do, and what faith can look like. Jesus is calling us to live that faith now, regardless of the obstacles and criticisms we might encounter.

That could look like working on human exploration endeavors and using them to show how ridiculous it is to fear people for the color of their skin or look down on them because of their gender. It might look like any of our ministries here at Church of the Good Shepherd: keeping the chapel open during the week for those who need a restful place to pray or just be; attempting to participate in our local economy through our coffee shop and thrift shop ministries, offering a place of welcome through music, food, and prayer. All of these are ways we can show God's Kingdom of healing, forgiveness, love, and joy is not a far-off dream, it is here, it is real, it is something we don't have to be afraid to live into and to share. And it is how we can share in what gives God pleasure, sharing God's Kingdom, so that we can delight in such work together with God.

And in so doing, we may discover, that one of those engaged in ministry with us, might remind us of the One who said not to be afraid, who is the Resurrection and the Life, and who has been with us all along in the Holy Spirit.

It is so good to be back here with you all, and to continue to grow together and share in the work the Holy Spirit continues to call us to, to bring God's healing love to our neighbors and watch as walls of fear melt into well-springs of hope. Thanks be to God.