

Pentecost II Year B Proper 6

Texts: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

Psalm 20

2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

Mark 4:26-34

“for we walk by faith and not by sight...there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything is new!” 2 Corinthians 5:7, 17b

**In the name of the One who makes all things new+ Amen.**

**When I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I had an amazing Math teacher. His name was Mr. Binder. Mr. Binder could explain something any number of ways to help the student understand algebra. He had to be amazing because he even made that year understandable to me...it was the only year I understood anything math related.**

**Mr. Binder had a unique skill. He had a photographic memory along with an uncanny ability to see things that others missed as well as to accurately predict how things were going to unfold. What he saw was always six or seven steps ahead of anybody else. I would have hated to go up against him in a game of chess.**

**Because of his memory and his knack for probability he was banned from the casinos in Las Vegas. Mr. Binder is what is known as a card counter. He never cheated and nothing he did was illegal, he just knew what had been played and was able to calculate in his head the probability of what card would be thrown and when it would be thrown. Pretty amazing if you ask me.**

**Mr. Binder saw things differently than most people who go to Las Vegas, Atlantic City, or St. Louis. He knew his gift and had confidence in it and as a result he was very successful. He knew he could always beat the odds.**

**In this morning’s epistle, St. Paul tells us that as Christians we walk by faith and not by sight. I love these words from St. Paul. They sum up what Christians are about. St. Paul tells us that because of God’s entering human history, EVERYTHING has changed. Everything!**

**Nothing in life could ever be the same given the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Certainly for Paul nothing was the same. He was first a persecutor of the church, instigating the death of the followers of Jesus, and then he literally lost his vision on the road to Damascus. When his sight finally returned what and how Paul saw was radically changed. How he saw himself, how he saw others, and most importantly how he saw God was radically different than before he knew God in Christ.**

**Before knowing Christ Paul could see as the world saw things. There was cynicism and skepticism. There was power and politics, scheming and conniving. And Paul was a big part of it. After his encounter with Christ his very identity changed. Who he was, whose he was, and what he stood for was completely different because Christ had entered his life. He no longer saw moment to moment, but was able to see the future with Christ and what it could possibly hold.**

**Paul wasn't a step or two ahead of the young Church; he was six or seven steps ahead. He knew the card that God had played in Jesus Christ. He knew what had been promised to him in Jesus and he was able to share that and articulate it in a way others could understand.**

**Paul went from being a persecutor of the church, with blood on his hands for the deaths of many followers, to the greatest evangelist and apostle the world has ever known. What were the chances of that happening?**

**What are the odds that he would be accepted by those he previously tried to kill? What are the odds that his words would be remembered 2000 years later? I think all of us would say they were slim to none.**

**But then again, what do you think the odds are that a young, unmarried peasant girl, betrothed to a much older man, would be chosen to bare the God-child?**

**What do you think the odds are that 30 years later this God-child, this God made man, would call some fisherman, some women, a despised tax collector, and other "unacceptable" people to carry God's message into the world? It is not exactly the most auspicious of beginnings.**

**How many of us would have bet some money that this rag-tag group would be successful?**

**What do you think the odds are that a young woman from Austria, fleeing from Hitler's advances into her country, would come to this country and meet a woman on a street corner in New York City, ask her for directions, and for this woman not only to take her to her destination, but to offer this young woman a place to live?**

**What do you think the odds are that this woman who took the young woman into her home and life would be married to an Episcopal priest? And what do you think the odds are that this young Austrian woman and her husband would 25 years later, in thanksgiving for everything that had been given to them and shown to them, would join with two other couples to found a church in the Diocese of Missouri called St. Matthew's?**

**The story of God in Jesus, the story of his coming into the world and changing the world, and giving people throughout the ages his message to proclaim is a story against all odds. It always has been, from the very beginning. And it most probably always will be.**

**The Church has always survived against the odds. It has survived against the odds because the power of the Holy Spirit can defy anything. It will survive because we can trust God's promises to us.**

**Because we can trust God's promises to us, we can walk in faith, not knowing exactly where we may be going, but trusting in God to lead us there.**

**By walking in faith, we need not fear failure. That doesn't mean we will always be successful. It means that we have the freedom to follow Jesus and act in his name, knowing that if we fail at something God will even use our failures to help move forward his kingdom.**

**If we concentrate on living for Christ, loving one another, and serving God's people, if we walk by faith, not trusting what we see, but trusting in God we will always beat the odds.**

**Knowing Jesus changed Paul and how he saw the world, and what he thought was possible. Knowing Jesus, will if we let it, change us. We can start seeing the world not as the world sees, but as God sees.**

**Knowing Jesus we can see what is possible where world sees what is impossible. Knowing Jesus we see opportunities where the world sees obstacles. Knowing the gift that God has given us and having confidence in God's promises, we will indeed beat the odds.**

**Amen.**