

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, oh God, my strength and my joy... Amen

It's that mystical time of the year again. When the skies embrace the squawking, trumpeting, and honking sound of the majestic cranes as they embark on their migration south.

In fact, just the other Sunday I arrived at St. John to find two Sandhill cranes gracefully walking in the field. I watched in awe as they delicately moved from one leg to the next.

And then just as though something was calling them, they both turned directions and with a flap of their wings and a loud reverberating trumpeting call, they took to the sky and headed south.

Crane migration, well and in general, bird migration has always fascinated me. And cranes in particular amaze me because of their sheer size and the vast array of different crane species across the world.

For example, the smallest species of crane, the demoiselle crane, follows a migratory route of the highest altitude, as they migrate over the Himalaya Mountains.

Whereas another species of crane, the lesser sandhill crane, migrates the farthest. They fly from Northeastern Siberia to northern Mexico, ignoring the arbitrary borders us humans have put up for different countries and continents.

And as for the sandhill cranes I saw, the sandhill crane migrates on average 5,000 miles one way.

Now that takes patience, endurance, and trust... There is no map to check, no road to follow, and no GPS to plug into your phone.

As these migratory routes are a part of the cranes very being. And they are a gift that each crane shares with their offspring. A gift that becomes

embodied in them, a part of them, and is still largely a mystery to the scientific community.

And because of this gift, the cranes need to put in the long hard work of migration.

Hours upon hours flying, resting, eating, flying, resting, eating... Until they arrive at their wintering destination.

And this journey cannot be easy. Especially with shrinking natural habitats, powerline collisions, and other factors.

But yet, they always embark on this journey... As though it is a yearning that is calling to them from inside their hollow bones.

A yearning, that perhaps we can all relate to. Of being a part of something greater than ourselves by living a life of faith.

And just a while ago, we heard the apostles talk about faith, as they asked Jesus to increase their faith... And from that request we heard a particularly strange answer.

An answer involving a mustard seed and about slaves dutifully following orders and expectations.

Now I would be remiss if I did not touch on the slavery issue glaring in today's gospel.

First of all, slavery in the ancient world was much different than what we have come to know. Secondly, Jesus was in no way endorsing a life of slavery.

Instead, Jesus was relating to something that the people of his time could understand. As slaves were more like servants, as this was more like a job opportunity for people without money and resources. And also, they could be freed.

Meaning Jesus was hinting at something deeper. As Jesus wanted to highlight the relationship between slave and master, and that their relationship was based on mutual accountability and mutual expectations. As both were devoted to one another in different ways.

Revealing to us, that in order to follow Christ we need to be accountable for our actions, and that as Christians we have certain expectations.

And because of Christ we have learned what our actions should be and what expectations are. Which are unveiled to us through faith.

But the mysterious thing about faith, is that it is not based on the things we do or the things we know... As we heard in the reading from 2nd Timothy... Faith is a gift that lives in you.

Faith is a gracious gift from the Triune God. As God gives us this gift through the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit... Where the Spirit works in us and binds us to Christ, the one whom we follow.

But this is easy to forget. As we often think that faith is something we can control and when life gets messy or hard, we too might find ourselves crying out, increase my faith!

So that we can gain the benefits of the elusive rich faith. But that is to miss the mark. Because as much as faith is a personal journey, faith is also meant to be lived out communally. As Christ was all about how we live together, in relationship.

And today we heard the hard reminder from Jesus that there are certain expectations of us.

Because to truly follow Christ, means we need to serve others, like Christ served us. And to do so without hoping to get something in return...

Because we have already been given the greatest gift of all... Life in Christ.

But that does not mean that a life of faith is going to be easy or that if we just pray harder or have more faith good things will come to us. Because that is not how faith works.

As Jesus said the only faith you need, is no bigger than a mustard seed...

Because faith is not about what you can do... It is what God does through you and through the community of Christ.

So that when you are truly exhausted... Or when you physically can't help your neighbor... Or when you think you don't have much faith left... That is when you lean into this community because here, we are always holding one another in faith.

Meaning we can be your faith when you don't have much left to give. As God is always at work in communities of faith.

After all, God, the Creator has shown us the importance of community in many things, even that of bird migration. After all birds migrate together, not alone.

And sometimes that migration will be great. You may be high in the sky catching a great tail wind and finding yourself ready to soar over the Himalayan Mountains...

Other times the journey may feel ridiculously long... Like you have traveled from Siberia and that Mexico is nowhere in sight.

But yet, you are called to keep on flying, to put in that work, mile after mile. Even when you don't know the path that lays ahead... As our faith informs us of the final destination.

And we are called to share this good news and this gift of faith with others.

Just as cranes instinctively pass on the gift of migration to their offspring, we too can pass on the gift of faith with others.

And just as cranes ignore political borders migrating across countries and even continents.

We too can put aside our political differences, and embrace each other with mutual respect and love.

And what better way to do that, than to experience a life of faith together.

To migrate together... To call out to God with our trumpeting voices in song... And to trust in the mysterious workings of the spirit.

The Spirit who enlivens your faith every day. As the Spirit works within you. Filling you with a yearning, a destination, and a purpose... Amen.