

Wednesday, June 7, 2017 - Day 157 – II Chronicles 20-22, Psalm 127, I Corinthians 2

"Unless the Lord builds the house, their labor is in vain who build it." Psalm 127

"But we have the mind of Christ" First letter of Paul to the Corinthians 2:16

Many people think that the aphorism, "God helps those who help themselves" is from the Bible. But it's not. It's from Poor Richard's Almanac written by Philadelphia's own brilliant pragmatist, Benjamin Franklin, who conceived and mapped the city which is the center of our diocese. The Bible doesn't tell us that God helps those who help themselves. The Bible tells us that God helps those who are willing to accept God's help. That's a much more humbling message.

We live in a world in which we are exhorted to be smart and to work hard. Concern about the best schools, the best universities and the best opportunities bring pressure to bear even on young children in parts of our society. And is this a bad thing? If we understand ourselves as responsible for ourselves, as needing to do work and discipline ourselves to be good citizens, or good workers or good friends or good wives, husbands, mothers and fathers, won't the world work better for everyone? And yet the psalmist says that the hard work of building and creating means nothing unless we know and live as though God is in charge.

It's important to know that there are limits to what our hard work can accomplish. All of us have worked hard for a goal and not reached it. We have worked for a loved one to survive an illness that turned out to be terminal. We have worked for a job opportunity, a relationship, an experience that is deeply desired, and yet does not happen. We've all had the opportunity to experience that we are not in charge of many things that matter greatly in our lives, no matter how hard we work. It seems to me that how we respond to that learning makes a very big difference in our lives. It seems to me that it's possible to have a point of view in which we can not only accept, but even be grateful that we are not in charge of our lives.

In the first letter to the community in Corinth, Paul offers a perspective that goes beyond that of the Psalmist and into the mystery of life in Christ. Paul says that we have "the mind of Christ," a way of looking at our lives which offers a perspective larger and deeper than that of the world... a perspective that the world will probably not understand. God sees the big picture, and faith tells us that the big picture is Love. Paul is saying that Christ is in charge, that Love is in charge in a way that must be lived into to be understood. We can and must work hard because that is how we participate in life. We can and must participate in God's agenda of love and justice for all people. In so doing we will probably get some of what we want, and surely not get some of what we want. But love never fails. In the mind of Christ, we are loved, deeply loved... but we are not in charge. Thanks be to God.

By The Ven. Pamela Nesbit.