

Fearful Living – Faithful Living

Psalm 27

Luke 13: 31-35

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

My scripture studies professor used to warn us that when we were writing our sermons to do enough research so that we would know the context of the passage we were preaching on... that we know something about the people to whom it was addressed and what the message may have been for them.

But then he went on to say... but don't do too much research...

Well, to a bunch of hopeful 'not quite reverends' that was not terribly helpful!

And perhaps especially for me since I had been preaching for 4 years before I ever took a scripture studies course.

Now, I have always done research... but how much is too much...

Anyone who has done bible study or other faith exploration groups with me, knows that I don't have all the answers!

What my professor was trying to make us understand was that as preachers, we can read commentaries, participate in on-line discussions and wind up more confused than when we started.

It is a fact that there are as many different interpretations of scripture as there are people doing the interpreting.

And my professor said that after preaching and teaching for more than 30 years, there were times when he wound up more confused as well!

What he did then, was go back to the text itself... to stop reading what other people had written about it and reread the text.

In essence, to go back to the roots of the stories, rather than comments on the stories...

It is apparent all through our gospels that Jesus was attentive to his faith.

He knew scripture intimately and quoted it often...

“In this passage from LUKE, Jesus’ rootedness in God enables him to remain resolute in timing his movement toward Jerusalem.

Some Pharisees come to him and tell him to leave the territory because “Herod wants to kill you.”

It isn’t clear from the passage whether the Pharisees were warning him in an attempt to scare him off or out of sympathy for his cause.

Jesus is not influenced by either reason.

He makes it very clear that he, and not “that fox” Herod, will determine when he goes to Jerusalem.

Jesus is well aware of the danger that awaits him—so aware that he doesn’t fear Herod.

It is not in Herod’s territory but in Jerusalem that he expects to meet a prophet’s death.

Jesus makes the hard choice to continue on the way he has chosen.

But he is no passive victim going meekly to his death.

His choice is rooted in what God has called him to do and in its inevitable cost.

But even facing that, Jesus’ concern isn’t so much for himself as for the people of Jerusalem.

He uses the beautiful image of being like a mother hen who would gather the chicks to herself, to love and protect them.

Jesus longs to bring God's Reign to fulfillment.

What awaits him are those who would sacrifice the prophets for political expediency.

Even knowing this, he continues on.” (WPOG – Lent 2, 2007)

Those of you who have been at funerals have heard me quote Psalm 27 at the beginning of the service, “God is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? God is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”

And Jesus, as a faithful Jew, would have been very familiar with this psalm which goes on to say...

Teach me your way, O God, lead me on a level path, safe from those who lie in wait for me.

Do not give me up to the will of my enemies, for liars and false witnesses arise against me. I believe that I shall see God's goodness in the land of the living.

Wait for God; be strong, and take courage; yes, wait for God!

Hear those final words again: **Wait for God; be strong, and take courage; yes, wait for God!**

The grounding that Jesus had in the scriptures give him the courage to be about what he is about... and not to be dictated by anyone else's agenda or timetable.

Scholars mostly agree that Jesus never planned to set up a different religion known as Christianity, but wanted the Hebrew people to go back to the roots of their faith... not all the laws that had built up around it, but the fundamentals... or as he said, “Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself... these are the two greatest commandments...

He lived out of faithfulness, not fear.

How can we do the same?

How can we keep from being held hostage by our fear?

Fear is an appropriate response to danger and that primal instinct is part of how humanity evolved and responded to danger.

However, when that fear response continues to manifest itself in ways that are actually counterproductive, when the danger doesn't exist, what can we do?

What are your fears?

I don't know... even as you know one of mine. 😊

What are the fears of the faith community?

After being here for almost two years, I would say the number one fear of this faith community is not having enough money to continue to keep the church going in this time and place.

It's a real fear... and you can read about our financial situation in the Annual Report and will hear more about it next week at the Annual Meeting.

But what is the appropriate response to that fear?

Is it to hunker down behind walls of habit?

I have two ideas of the appropriate response to that fear.

One is to look at the very early history of UM... to realize once again, how the people who brought this church into being acted out of faithfulness, not fear.

The other is to look to scripture... to go back to the basics of our faith... to hear God's words of faithfulness and encouragement.

Think of those days following the Halifax Explosion...

It would have been easy to be very discouraged... between the two founding churches, they lost 250 members.

But... within a few days after the great disaster, the survivors began to consider plans for the future.

A place of worship had a high priority as many had secured temporary accommodation for themselves.

Prior to this, a move was afoot to unite the Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

Thus a temporary church, known as the Tar Paper Church was built

The first service of worship was held here on March 17, 1918, just 100 days after the explosion. Rev. C. J. Crowdis referred to this day as, "A day I will never forget, perhaps one of the happiest in our whole congregational experience."

This building was the first place of worship erected in the devastated area. It served as a home church not only for the Kaye-Grove members, but also for Anglicans. Some Roman Catholics also met there until their place of worship was opened. (<http://unitedmemorialchurch.ca/history.html>)

And while the Presbyterians and Methodist churches had been talking of union across the country, these two churches did something very innovative and quite unique... with the two congregations cooperating so well together, they decided to rebuild only one church, not two and so United Memorial came into being.

They took the best of their history and created something new.

What unique and innovative thing is God planning for us?

I don't know...

But I do know that God is with us.

Over and over again, our scripture tells us that God is faithful to us.

And Jesus, with that beautiful, very female imagery of a mother hen with her chicks, longs to tuck us beneath his sheltering wings and protect us.

But we can't stay there, safely tucked up... but we can return to it over and over again, with words of scripture that encourage us and challenge us.

We can take heart from the stories of God's faithfulness.

We can take heart from the stories of our history.

Fearful living, faithful living... which one will we choose?

Thanks be to God, amen.

The God to whom Jesus prayed...

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Look to the history of UM and to scripture, for words of encouragement, for stories of God's faithfulness.