

11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 8, 2010
"By Fear or By Faith?"
Saint Luke 12:32-40

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Saint Luke 12:32

If I Had My Life to Live Over Again

(An 85 year old woman from the hill country of Kentucky reflects on her life)

If I had my life to live over again, I'd make more mistakes next time...I would relax...I would be sillier than I have been this trip. I know very few things I would take seriously...I would be less hygienic. I would take more chances. I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets. I would eat more ice cream and fewer beans. I would have more actual problems and fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I am one of those people who live seriously and sanely, hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I have had my moments, and if I had it to do over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd have nothing else. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

I have been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it over again, I would travel lighter...I would start barefoot in the early Spring and stay that way later into the Fall. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daisies."

[Source: [Healing the Eight Stages of Life](#) by Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant, & Dennis Linn, page 3]

By faith Sarah and Abraham took off to who knows where on the whim and the promise of the call of God. Through dark days and starry night they traveled. That spontaneous open interaction between this stable couple turned nomads has created three vibrant faith traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam!

In contrast the 85 year old woman from Kentucky who lived a stable life – took few chances and acted more out of fear than out of faith. Had she been Abraham's wife, she probably would not have gone with him!

By fear or by faith – how are we living? As individuals, as a church – how are we taking our journey through life: trusting in God’s promises, or creating our own illusory security?

Some of us have grown up with a faith that is full of fear: “if you don’t go to church every Sunday you are destined for hell – there are mortal sins and venial sins and God is keeping track of all your sins.” Guilt has been used by the church to manipulate people.

There are traditions that work out of strictness and fear. If you don’t agree to a certain set of doctrines you are rejected at the Communion table. Some traditions are stingy with grace and generous with law and judgment and guilt and fear.

But notice Abraham’s relationship with God. The covenant God makes takes place under a canopy of stars and the promise of land and a great people. And from such a faith filled journey and relationship of trust came descendants – *as many as the stars of heaven and the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

The eyes of Sarah and Abraham were not blinded by fear but opened by faith. They saw from a distance God’s future and acted in the present as though it had already happened.

In the Jewish Talmud, a commentary on the texts of the Hebrew Scripture, it is noted: *In the world to come each of us will be called to account for all the good things God put on earth which we refused to enjoy.*”

[Source: [Healing the Eight Stages of Life](#), page 89]

As a German-Lutheran or Irish Catholic, Stoic Swede or ‘*fill in the blank*’ – it has been engrained that we win God’s love by hard work and suffering. When fear dominates our relationship to God grace can become distorted! In a strange irony – I become the center and God is dethroned.

Mother Teresa saw this temptation and cried out: “From somber, serious, sullen saints save us, O Lord!” Christ gave us God’s love not only through the cross, but through playing with and blessing children.

Have no fear. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. God receives pleasure when we enjoy and participate in his generous and gracious reign.

Christ offers a prescription for those who act in faith. Notice in the Gospel reading for today that Jesus calls us to travel light, get focused, and be ready to move.

Travel light: too much stuff. Maybe you have watched these reality shows where people are hoarding stuff. They are trapped in so much stuff – literally trapped in their homes. Your heart goes out to them. But might we all have a bit of a hoarding problem. Is there stuff cluttering our lives that gets in the way of God's call or blocks out God's grace?

Recall the words of the 85 year old woman who reflected back on her life: *If I had to do it over again, I would travel lighter...*" A life weighed down with stuff is an exhausted life.

When we journey with Jesus we are called to travel light.

Get focused: By faith Sarah and Abraham focused on God's promise. During times of difficulty that starry night of promise flashed in their heads. Rather than get bogged down in the despair of the moment they saw their lives in the light of God's promised future. Rather than get stuck in the past 'good old days' – they headed toward the future of the city of God. From a distance they saw and greeted God impinging grace.

It is the old civil rights spiritual:
'Keep Your Eyes on the Prize"

Paul and Silas, bound in jail
Had no money for to go their bail
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)

Paul and Silas began to shout
Doors popped open, and they walked out
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Well, the only chains that we can stand
Are the chains of hand in hand
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Got my hand on the freedom plow
Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!

Rather than despair in the moment we are called to get focused – keep your eyes on the prize and hold on!

Christ's prescription to journey by faith: Lighten your load. Get focused. Get ready to move!

Get ready to move: a life hankering for stability and predictability will be a life disappointed.

Recall the words of the 85 year old woman: *I am one of those who lived sanely, hour after hour, day after day...if I had to do it over again...I would take more chances...I would start barefoot early in the Spring and stay that way later into the Fall...*

Get ready to move. God is reordering life. Notice what Jesus says:

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down and eat, and he will come and serve them.

This is a radical reversal. Do we grasp the radical nature of this statement – a master serving a slave in the first century in the Middle East would be a grand offense!

Later in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the first will be last and the last first [St. Luke 13: 30]. In Luke's story of the Church – The Book of Acts - the followers of Christ are turning the world upside down [Acts of the Apostles 17:6]

God's people are not called to retreat to the safest compound and remain "pure." No, we are called to live out the Gospel right in the heart of society where God is bringing in the kingdom.

This summer's theme is 'Jesus' Journey and Ours.'
Our journey is a call from the Teacher:

Lighten your load!
Focus on the prize!
Get ready to move!

Amen

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