

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH



Scripture:

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

⁴One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, LORD, do I seek. ⁹Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

Matthew 4:12-23

¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother

John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.
²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



HAVE A LITTLE FAITH

Concentrate for a few seconds and listen to the key words and phrases from Matthew 4:12-23.

- John had been arrested.
- Jesus withdrew to Galilee.
- The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.
- Light has dawned over the shadow of death. The Kingdom of heaven has come near. Follow me.
- Fish for people.
- He called them. Immediately they left and followed.
- Jesus went, teaching, proclaiming good news and curing every disease among the people.

Think about what words or phrases resonated with you in this passage. Which ones sparkle? Maybe they contain a message for you? Do you think God speaks through the Bible? Remember: Nothing is impossible with God! Nothing!

A TURBULENT TIME

I find some comfort in understanding that Jesus lived in a turbulent time. John who baptized Jesus was arrested for disrupting the peace. He was about to be beheaded. Jesus came to walk in the world alongside humankind at a time such as this.

Yet the people who were depressed and oppressed, those who felt they sat in darkness, they saw a great light of hope in Jesus. His light dawned and helped them understand the nearness of the kingdom of heaven.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Last week we had our Presbytery Leadership cohort meeting again. Every time we meet we read Mark 12:28-34 twice with two different translations and discuss what parts of the passage resonate with us that day. Often we talk about how the passage ends with Jesus saying, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.”

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven (which mean the same) are mentioned over one-hundred times in the Bible. So we try our best to define what is meant by this kingdom. I especially like the way it is described in Mark chapter 4:30-32.

³⁰With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

Basically according to Mark, the kingdom of God can be like a little faith that is nurtured and developed which evolves into a huge faith! When you have such faith, you experience the kingdom of God personally.

And when your time comes, faith helps you anticipate passing into a realm of joy and love rather than fear the unknown. I have observed many times where even a small bit of faith can give a sense of peace and tranquility that surpasses all understanding.

One of our church members, Judy, was telling me that when she was recently with her Mom during her passing just before Christmas, her mother seemed to see wonderful surprises during her transition. She would exclaim, "Oh, how wonderful!" and point up towards the ceiling with a face full of wonder and delight! What a gift that was to Judy and her brothers at her bedside.

FAITH, DEATH AND DYING

I recommend spending some time exploring in your mind and with your family what you believe about your faith and death and dying. Our *Being Mortal* series is a wonderful resource to assist you to intentionally plan your final chapter. I hope you all will still join us today if you can. Last week the palliative care doctor guided us to imagine what was most important to us now and how to stay healthy enough to keep doing what ever that was, and then to imagine what thing will be the most important in our final days.

I put being pain free but still conscious enough to talk to my family as one of my final wishes. If you don't write these things down in your Advanced Directive, your family may not know what is important to you. We learn from experience. My Aunt Verda, who recently died, was sedated so heavily for seven days after her heart attack that she was never able to say farewell or hear her family express their final words of love. My father didn't have a *Do Not Resuscitate* order in place before he went into cardiac arrest in the hospital, and he died in the midst of a major and fairly violent effort to resuscitate him. My mother was told to stand outside the room during their efforts so she was denied the right to be at his side during his passing. It is important to ponder your final wishes and communicate them to your family and file them in your hospital's records.

The *Being Mortal* program motivates us to think thoughtfully about our end time on

this earth. Being prepared spiritually and physically as much as possible is a great gift to yourself and your family, too.

A LITTLE FAITH LIKE THE MUSTARD SEED

There are other resources too. Mitch Albom's book, *Have a Little Faith*, divides up the sections by seasons. Growing up on a farm taught me to pay a lot of attention to the seasons. Preparing for and adapting to the seasons is vital to the success of the farm, or your garden, or the garden of your life.

In Albom's book he explains that in the beginning of writing this book he was a fallen angel religiously. He felt like his faith had drifted and then wandered off as the result of apathy, until he married a Christian Arab. And in developing this book, his faith changed over time as he interviewed a Rabbi friend he called the Reb, who asked Mitch to prepare his eulogy to read someday at his funeral. In the process of developing the eulogy, Albom learned to have a little faith, like the mustard seed.

I love the answer the Reb gave Albom when he asked what he talked to God about.

**The Reb said,
"These days, I say, 'God, you know
I'm going to see you soon.
And we'll have some
nice conversations.
But meanwhile, God, if you're
gonna take me, take me already.
And if you're gonna leave me here,'
(looking up at the ceiling with his
hands raised) he added, 'maybe
give me the strength to do
what should be done.'"**

The Reb taught Mitch that prayer rituals were always important because he said,

“Faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe.”

Three years later Albom was still preparing the eulogy with the Reb alive and still on his feet. Even though it was a surprise to both of them that he kept living, Mitch still enjoyed interviewing his childhood Rabbi about what he called “his beautiful faith.

This book really touched my heart. And it has a theme similar to our *Being Mortal* series about being prepared.

HE SLEEPS IN A STORM

Albom tells a story from one of the Reb’s sermons that is the perfect parable for being prepared: “A man seeks employment on a farm. He hands his letter of recommendation to his new employer. It reads simply, “He sleeps in a storm.”

The farmer is desperate for help, so he hires the man. Several weeks pass and suddenly in the middle of the night a powerful storm rips through their valley. The farmer calls for his new hired hand but the man still sleeps soundly. So he dashes off to the barn and sees to his amazement that the animals are secure with plenty of feed. So he runs out to the field and sees the bales of hay are bound and wrapped up well. Then he races to the silo and finds the doors are latched and the grain is dry.

Then he understands what the resume meant, “He sleeps in a storm.”

So the Rabbi explained it this way: “My friends, if we tend to the things that are important in life, if we are right with those we love and behave in line with our faith, our lives will not be cursed with an aching throb of unfulfilled business. Our words will always be sincere, our embraces will be tight. We will never wallow in the agony of ‘I could have or I should have.’” We can sleep in a storm. And when it’s time, our good-byes will be complete.”

LOVE, FORGIVE, BE COMPASSIONATE AND MERCIFUL

Remember, the light has already dawned in the valley of the shadow of death. God is with you now and will be with you always to the end of the age.

Jesus calls for you to follow him and his ways because when you do, you will experience a taste of the kingdom, even more abundant life than you can hope for or imagine. You are invited to be a disciple of Christ today as those ordinary disciples were invited over two-thousand years ago.

Live in the light. Have a little faith. Enjoy the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven now by living the life you have been called to live. Love, forgive, be compassionate and merciful. Know and trust that you are loved unconditionally by God and spread that love which is the Good News. Be a healing power and light of hope for all. And trust that no matter when you finally meet your maker face to face, you will be ready because you have enough faith that enables you to sleep through storms. Amen

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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