

Sermon

Sunday, February 3, 2019

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Exodus 17:1-7, John 11:17-27

Don't Give Up – Look UP

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

Have you ever been to the end of your rope? Times when you look around you and see no hope? Coming to the end of our rope can happen instantly, through the death of our spouse or loved one, or can happen over time when the thought of “What could have been” slides us right down to the knot. Like a friend of mine said recently, “I feel like I’m looking forward through my rear-view mirror.” Not a good way to live.

Now, If you’ve never been to the end of your rope, I have two messages for you: Praise God, and look out, it’s probably coming. If you’re at the end of your rope now, then this sermon is for you, and, you are not alone. Let me introduce you to two folks in Scripture at the end of their rope: Moses and Martha.

First, Moses. Just three chapters ago, God gives the Jews the most epic miracle ever. With the Egyptians in hot pursuit, 600 thousand Jews are surrounded with no hope. They had 600 Egyptian chariots chasing them from one side, and the mighty Red Sea on the other. They were literally surrounded. As my son Hudson would say, they were “dunsky in the bunsky.” This is when the epic miracle happens. God divides the sea, with a quote, “Wall of water on the right and a wall of water on the left.” Picture what an immense wall of water looks like! The other miracle is that the Bible then says 600,000 Jews walk through on a dry sea bed. It wasn’t even muddy! Epic! We know the rest of the story - the Jews get out fine on the other side while those walls of water then come crashing down on the Egyptians. Not one would survive. On the other side, God provides for the Jews by sending manna from heaven to feed them for their journey!

Therefore, words can’t describe what happens next. The Jews, after seeing first hand the epic water wall rescue, bBegin

doubting God. They are getting thirsty in the heat and demand, “Moses, where is the water? Did you bring our children and cows out here to die of thirst?” And they literally want to impeach, then stone Moses. Three chapters after the epic miracle! Six chapters after the 10 plagues! I hope Moses kept a punching bag on his camel. “Are you kidding me you bunch of no good faithless ones. After all we’ve been through?”

Moses goes into his tent and cries out to the Lord, what am I to do with these people? They want to stone me! Remember, Moses at this time was 80 years old when he told God yes to bringing the people out of Egypt! He’s thinking, “I should be retired playing golf. Or a happy grandfather babysitting full time. These people are driving me crazy!” It was Frederick the Great, but may as well have been Moses, who said, “The more I get to know people, the more I love my dog.” Moses is at the end of his rope.

This exasperation isn’t bound by gender. Martha is also at the end of her rope. Her brother Lazarus was dead...and not just dead, she felt ignored by Jesus! They send messengers to tell Jesus to get to Bethany pronto. Here’s what happens. It takes a day for them to find Jesus. Jesus surprisingly gets the message and doesn’t do a thing with it for another two days. Then Jesus takes a full day to travel to Bethany. By that time, too late, Lazarus is dead, and the family is fuming. Martha sees Jesus coming and gives it to him with both barrels. “Jesus, dang it, had you been here my beloved brother would not have died.” Martha at the end of her rope.

Have you been there? Moses moments? Martha moments? Here’s a secret. We priests have Moses and Martha moments. Like Moses, we see the miracles being done, and proclaim, have no anxiety, remember,

remember every other time God rescued you! But then like Martha we too shake our fist at Jesus. Why Jesus? Why can’t you save Eve Evans from hospice? Why Jesus? Why couldn’t you have saved Tom Trainer, whom we buried on Thursday, from his brain tumor. Why Jesus? Why couldn’t you have saved precious Clara Mae, our 17 month old St Michaelite who died of the flu last week. On Monday, I found myself at Clara Mae’s open casket, positioned there in front of our altar for a 90-minute visitation. I found myself praying Lord, even now, do a miracle, bring her up out of that casket. Yes, we clergy have our Moses and Martha moments. We’re all in it together.

Thankfully, in the stories of Martha and Moses, we find the recipe for what to do when we, like them, get to the end of our ropes. It’s a simple five word answer I want you to memorize: Don’t give Up - Look Up! Giving up happens when we look everywhere but up. For the Jews, they look down, they look across, and are therefore paralyzed in fear and angst. Are we that much different? We too are prone to look down in our exasperation. We too are prone to live the hymn we opened our service with, “Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love!” We too have seen God work in our lives and praised Him, but for whatever reason, when the bumps hit, we look everywhere but up. I believe looking up at the end of our rope is a discipline. After all, the only way to look up is to decide not to look in any other direction. I will not seek just horizontal solace through more alcohol or destructive behavior. I will first go vertical! Lord Jesus I will seek you as the knot on the rope. Remembering what Jesus has done for us is a discipline! Remembering as He saved us before, He will save us again!

Time for a little humor as we take a breath. For two weeks now I have not mentioned the Super Bowl, nor the Patriots, but I can't hold back any longer. Two Super Bowls ago, the New England Patriots were down 28-3 with 2 minutes to go in the 3rd quarter against the Atlanta Falcons. I know for some these are painful memories, others, joyful. In one of the great comebacks of all time, the Patriots beat the Falcons 34-28 in overtime. Bob Kraft, the owner of the Patriots, wanted to remember this comeback, he wanted his players to remember the time they could have given up. What does he do? He has NFL Super Bowl rings made for each player. Each ring contained 283 diamonds to help them remember they were down 28-3 and came back. Do the math, rings for each player, that's a total of 14,999 diamonds. All right, a bit over the top. My point? Remembering is a discipline! Sometimes we even have to wear it.

From Foxborough back to Moses. Moses looks up by going to God first. What if in our panic, we went to God first before anything or anybody. When Moses does, three things happen, and they all begin with the letter p. First, Moses looks up by crying out to God, and as he does, he immediately hears the promise of God. "Verse 6...I am with you Moses; I will stand there with you." When we look up we may not always hear that tangible voice, but when we look up by reading the promises of God in Scripture we hear His voice! Hebrews 13: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." John 8: "I have set you free." Elsewhere: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Don't give up, look up and recount His promises.

Second, look up and you will receive the provision of God. In verse 6 and 7, God says, "Moses, use that stone and strike the rock, and water will come out of it for all the people to drink." Yes, God takes the stone that the people wanted to kill him with, and uses it to free Him! God provides! We look up, and we see that provision all over Scripture!

In Peter's second letter, in fact, we read, "Jesus has given us everything we need for a Godly life."

Moses looks up, receives the promise and the provision,. And finally, Moses looks up and receives the Power of God. Notice, this

looking up water tapping miracle was done in the sight of the elders so all could see that the power of God could be seen as greater than their fear. The same power we see Jesus give in Matthew. Jesus said, "your mistake is that you don't know the power of God." Paul in Corinthians: "For the Kingdom of God is not just talk; it is living by God's power."

Look up! Promise. Provision. Power. My friends, in our stories this morning, we are Moses, we are the Jews, and we are the Marthas! Maybe this is what led Mother Theresa to say, "Don't grumble, don't praise, just pray." But the central figure most important figure in both stories? Jesus. My friends, when you get to the end of your rope, Look Up!

After all, that's what Jesus did.

Back to Martha, Chapter 11 verse 41. Jesus looks up and yells, "Lazarus, come out of the tomb." Promise. Provision. Power. Lazarus walks out, healed and whole.

Here is the most important part of this sermon. When we look up, we realize that Jesus Christ is our promise, our provision, and our power. It's at the end of the rope that we find Jesus. Sometimes, not always, but sometimes, Jesus will even slide you down the rope into His arms. As we talked about in Sunday School today, we as humans often see trials as God's way of testing us to see if we depend on Him and how deep our faith runs.

But trials are not for God to know our faith. Trials are so we might come to know the author of our faith. Let me say that again. We often see trials as God's way of testing how deep our faith runs. No. Trials are so we might come to know the author of our faith. You will never understand that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.

The whole Bible finds its central meaning in the promise, provision, and power of Jesus Christ. Jesus is expected in the Old Testament. Jesus is exhibited in the Gospels. Jesus is explained in the Epistles. And Jesus is exalted in the Revelation. Even in the scene of Moses striking the rock. Paul in Corinthians 10 says to all Jesus believers, "Don't be discouraged! Remember! As Moses led the people from out of the Sea from death to salvation, the Jews then ate and drank meals provided daily by God. And the Jews then drank from the rock. The Jews drank

from the rock, and that rock is Jesus Christ, the living water! Jesus was there in Exodus, providing them a way out! Jesus is the bearer of the promise, provision, and power throughout time and eternity. His provision is enough! Don't give up, Look up, to the rescuer of all time!

Finally, this morning, on Monday I was half way through one of the most difficult sermons I've ever had to preach. It was during the funeral of seventeen month old Clara Mae Harman. I was addressing Clara Mae's brothers, Taver and Stone, and her sister Stella, just reminding them of the promise of Jesus, that they would see Clara Mae again.

I was weeping in my spirit as I found myself begging them and all present to see the saving promises of Jesus in the tragedy. When all of a sudden, Clara Mae's 4-year-old brother named Stone says, "I know, I pray I play with Clara, all the time!" It was the first time in 22 years of ordained life that I entered dialogue with another during a sermon, and from a 4-year-old at that! I had come to the end of my rope in that sermon and Jesus met me there through the sweet voice of a 4-year-old! In that moment of interaction, I felt Jesus saying, "Al, as tough as this is, I've got this. I even spoke through a 4-year old for you! Count on my promises, I will provide, trust my power."

So, my friends, don't give up, look up. Jesus was enough for Moses. He was enough for Martha. He is enough for us.