

Walking By Faith

Texts: Ezekiel 17:22-24, II Corinthians 5:6-17
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – June 13, 2021
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Two weeks ago, I attended a pastor's respite retreat sponsored by our new Presbytery up at Camp Johnsonburg. It was a time for pastors to get away, to gather, to pray, and to take some Sabbath time after this incredibly difficult year that we have all had. One of the optional activities that was available to us was a zipline. Now, I have to admit that ziplining is something that has been on my bucket list for quite some time, so I was excited to be able to try. Also, very nervous.

The zipline at Camp Johnsonburg is called "Leap of Faith," and I can attest that it was a leap of faith. For I was most nervous just before I jumped. Standing on the platform with nothing but trees and rocks below was one of the most daunting experiences of my life. As the camp attendant counted down, my nerves almost got the best of me. But I jumped. And I am so glad that I did. The wait was the worst part of the whole thing. Once I jumped, the thrill was incredible. I would definitely do it again.

In our Scripture lesson for this morning from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul is addressing the situation of all believers. It is better to be with the Lord away from the body. In other words, the ultimate goal of those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to be with God for all of eternity. However, in the meantime, while Paul is in his human, earthly body, he walks by faith. As Paul endures hardship, encounters people who vehemently disagree with him, and brings the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, he walks by faith. He does not put stock in what he sees around him – or in the powers or authority of those with whom he walks. Instead, Paul journeys in faith – knowing that God is with him – that God will see him through the difficult times.

We walk by faith. Every single day. Certainly, for the last 15 months, we, as a church family, have walked by faith. Your Session has walked by faith. The Reopening Team has

walked by faith. Your worship leaders have walked by faith. And your pastor has walked by faith. We have done so not only since March a year ago, but for the last 153 years. God has guided us. God has directed each of our steps. God has shown us what to do. We walk by faith in discerning where God is leading us now and in the future.

Faith is what prompted the Session to begin the Adopt-A-Family ministry, where we have sponsored a family in need for the last almost two years. They have received support from this church that has helped sustain them, especially during the pandemic. Walking in faith is what our Deacons do each and every month. They intentionally look for needs in this area and beyond for which to show compassion and the love of Jesus Christ. And our food ministry. I hope you heard or have taken the time to read Sue King's synopsis of where God has led us in this important ministry in our community. We have walked by faith.

As we look ahead, where do we go from here? From my perspective, I think the opportunities are unlimited. Our outreach now spans multiple states because of our online worship platform, Zoom. We walk by faith in bringing the hope of Jesus Christ to others, whether they live in Ringoes, Flemington, or across the country. Being part of a church family could mean something completely new and different moving forward. Something none of us could have imagined or expected.

As I shared in the children's message this morning, David was an unlikely candidate for king. No one expected him to be chosen. There were older, more experienced brothers. There is no way that the youngest, perceivably weakest brother would be the one chosen by God. And yet, God had other plans. God knew what was needed, and David became king. And his line paved the way for Jesus to come.

No one expected. Friends, this thing we call Zoom would not have happened with out the pandemic. If I had come to Session or the congregation with the great idea of a virtual platform for worship before last March, most would have thought I was out of my mind. We walked by

faith and now we have been able to connect with so many people. Where do we take that from here? How do we bring the Good News of Christ beyond our own little circle? Pray about it. Give us your ideas. Walk in faith with me – with us.

“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” While Paul has come to understand this concept of grace – that there is nothing we can do to earn our place with the Lord, he also understands that all believers will come to account before God. And so, he exhorts the Corinthians to make it their goal to please the Lord.

We do not think much about judgment and fearing the Lord these days because of the grace promised to us from God through Christ. However, our goal should still be to please the Lord in what we say and do, how we act, and ways that we look to serve. Do we always put others first? Do we show others respect and kindness in all circumstances and situations? Are we careful not to judge others?

In the first Scripture reading from Ezekiel, which Steve read, God talks about planting – and what He plants, bears fruit and becomes a splendid cedar. It is a good reminder for us to consider how we bear fruit each and every day so that we might become more splendid. Or at least more faithful in our walk with God. To bear the kind of fruit that Paul reminds the Galatian church is of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Are these all reflected in your life, not just on Sundays but every day? What do you need to do to please God more on a daily basis?

For when we make it our goal to please God, it is Christ’s love that compels us to action. When Paul experienced Christ on the road to Damascus, his life was changed forever. These believers who were enemies of Paul – whom Paul helped to persecute – were now brothers and

sisters in the faith. And it was all because Christ's love compelled Paul to act, to reach out, and to share the Good News.

Christ's love compels us to seek to please God, to walk by faith, and to regard no one from a worldly point of view. We are compelled to reach out to all – everyone – to bring the hope in Christ. Jennifer Pietz, visiting assistant professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in Minnesota, gives us this perspective. She writes, “But the text is ultimately one of hope and much needed promise amidst all sorts of challenges. The true love that every human being deeply longs for has already been given to us in Christ. It is a love that knows everything about us and embraces us anyway. It is the love that transforms us to reflect Christ to our neighbors. It is a powerful, reconciling love that makes it possible for people who mistrust or misunderstand each other to be brought into mutually-edifying relationships. Declaring that the old life **has passed** and God's new life **has already come** is an act of faith that refuses to be complacent with anything less than what God has promised us” (From Internet. www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-2-corinthians-56-10-11-13-14-17-5. 06/08/21).

Let us each be compelled in Christ's love, and let us walk in faith, trusting God with our future. Let us pray...

Faithful God, allow us the will and the strength and the desire to walk in faith all of our days. When the way becomes unclear or we are afraid, walk with us in faith. When we are tempted to please ourselves before pleasing You, walk with us in faith. When we feel compelled to respond to another in a way other than in the love of Christ, walk with us in faith. In all things, let us trust You. Through Christ we pray, Amen.