

Psalm 62:5-8

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honour; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

I Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

African-American Spiritual "O Freedom"

O freedom! O freedom! O freedom over me.
And before I'll be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free.

No more moaning, no more moaning,
No more moaning over me.
And before I'll be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free.

No more weeping, no more weeping,
No more weeping over me.
And before I'll be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free.

"The Brown Paper Bag Debacle"

Rev. David Dalke

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It's not only a hymn of liberation and a hymn of freedom for the time of the Civil War, but it's also an important hymn in the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century. In fact, the day that Martin Luther King delivered his impactful "I Have a Dream" speech, that morning, to kick off the celebration of that day, Joan Baez on the steps of the Capitol in Washington DC also sang that song. And so now, my confession to you is that, while I love that song and I believe in the words of it, I keep saying to myself, "But what do we know about slavery? What do we know about what it means to have a landowner with claws into us, telling us what to do? What do we know about that?"

Only what we read. Maybe we have ancestors, maybe, but what do we know about slavery today? Probably not too much, first-hand, particularly. I know that there is human trafficking, people are dehumanized and compromised, victimized, and that is certainly a form of modern slavery, but even as we sit here today, we don't know anything about that, really. I don't think we do. So then I say to myself, "David, have I just made a stretch here? As you're preparing for this week, have you just made a stretch here?" Then I start thinking, no, because really, in many ways, we are enslaved people, in lots of our feelings inside ourselves. We are enslaved. We do have feelings that we have a difficult

time dealing with, that control us, that seem to have their claws into us. We are enslaved at times.

And one such feeling that I'd like to lift out this morning, and it may sound like, my goodness, it's not that big a deal, but it is a big deal, and that's the feeling that I simply want to call frustration. Frustration. And I've heard that word all week. You know, when you start to think about that for the sermon, and then you hear the word all the time, you see people who are experiencing it. "I am so frustrated about...." "I am too...." You hear the word all the time. Frustration. And I want to talk about it for a few minutes, because it's a sibling to stress. And we know what stress can do to us, emotionally and physically. So, frustration.

The first thing I want to say to us is that it's here to stay. If you're thinking of giving up frustration for Lent, it's not going to work. We've got it around us when we least suspect it. You know, you meet somebody on the street, and you haven't seen them for a while, but they call you by name and they know you, and you're looking at them and you're thinking, "Oh my goodness, who is this person?" You're talking, and inside your mind is working, "Who is this, who is this? Think of their name so I can acknowledge them..." You feel frustrated inside.

Remember those Christmas mornings when you opened all the presents, and they had to be put together? Wasn't that frustrating, when the instructions didn't just spell it out, and when they weren't easy to do? Clamp here, clamp there, you had to get screwdrivers and a hammer, and you didn't have the right... It was frustrating. People around here, we're going through some frustration. It's not heavy, but it's a little bit. We've got a budget, and we haven't met it yet, we're still shy. So we're having to cut down some things in ministry. People are meeting, committees are meeting and they're having to look at each other and say, "What are you willing to let go of?" It's frustrating.

I suspect this week many of you were at a stoplight behind somebody, and the light turned green, and they didn't move. They didn't move, and they were talking on their cell phone, and looking around. Not only were they doing that, then you looked at them a little bit more and you're gripping the wheel getting a little tense, and you wish they'd just go. The morning was beautiful until then. And then they're looking down and they're texting, they look up and the light turns yellow and they're across, and you're still there. You're still there at the red light. That's frustrating, isn't it? Yeah, that's what you feel. We all feel it.

So we've got it. We just have it everywhere we turn. So the second thing is, feel that feeling. Feel the feeling of frustration, but control the behavior. Feel the feeling, but control the behavior. That's our job. Now, when I was in high school, I wrestled on a team. My weight class was 103 if you can imagine. I'm not sure why you're laughing. Let me cinch this up just a little bit more. I worked so hard all season to keep my weight down. 103 pounds. I didn't eat much, and I would get out there on the mat and work out and I'd sweat, and in the shower the steam would come all over the place. I didn't like our coach. He was the football coach. He knew nothing about wrestling. He's sit on the top of

the lockers and he'd look out onto the field while we're on the mat sweating and he'd look out in the field at all his football team out there. Off season, mind you, with a volleyball, because that made it legal, running plays. He's look at us and say, "Keep that weight down, keep your weight down." I'd think. "Oh, man."

We're on our way to Salina, Kansas to wrestle, and we get there, and I go up and get ready to weigh in, and I step on the scale. I suck in my stomach, take a deep breath, and the scale.... I made it. My opponent, smaller than I, stockier, steps on the scale. No problem there. So he gets off and one of my buddies on the wrestling team looks at me and says, "Do you know who that was?" I said, "No." "Well, that's Ronnie Galwith." I said, "Ronnie Galwith?" "Yeah, he took first in the state last year in your weight class." I said, "Really?" He said, "Tonight, you're wrestling a state champion." I said, "Oh, no." He said, "Don't worry, he's a really nice guy."

He's a nice guy. So we get on the mat. 98-pounders are finished. Now it's the 103s. We get out there on the mat, and I'm trying to act like I know what I'm doing. And the referee brings us together, and he has us shake hands. And we shake hands, and he says "Wrestle." Ronnie moves toward me and I move toward him, and he puts his hand out again. I thought, "That's pretty cool" so I put my hand out and he grabbed my arm and threw me on the mat, turned me over, and it was over, just like that. It was over. It wasn't twenty seconds. It was over. Pinned. I got up and I walked over and sat down and all I could think about was, "I don't even need to take a shower today."

My buddy leaned over to me and he said, "David, what were you doing out there on the mat?" I said, "Well, I thought he wanted to shake hands again. You told me he was a nice guy..." It was so frustrating. So the meet is over and we go out to eat as a team, and when we stop at the restaurant we go in. And then I rode next to the coach, I'm sitting next to him, we get out and go in to eat, everybody orders and I barely order anything, I'm feeling frustrated. I don't like having to go through this all the time. So everybody leaves after the meal, and I lingered behind, and I went up to the counter and I bought something, and I put it in a brown paper bag, and I went out and I sat next to the coach, right next to him, and I opened my brown paper bag and here is what I pulled out. Ah yes, a cherry mash, the worst thing you can ever eat when you're losing weight. It says on there it's the sweetest candy since 1918 and I pulled that cherry mash out and I sat there and ate it in front of the coach, and he looked at me. "David, you can't wrestle. You can't keep your weight down, and now you're eating a cherry mash." In his frustration he turns on the radio and wouldn't you know it, it was on the Salina station and they were doing a re-broadcast of our wrestling match. And they just announced, "And now the 103 pound - here's Ronnie Galwith, returning state champion, David Dalke... oh it's over." It was a brown paper bag debacle, I mean to tell you. Absolutely.

Well, I looked up debacle. I wanted to make sure I was using the right word today, and it said "Debacle - a sudden disastrous collapse." It's a defeat, and that's true. It said a rout, and it was. And then it said, it's also "a ludicrous failure." A ludicrous failure. So I looked up the word ludicrous. And ludicrous said, "something absurd," - it's not getting any better - and then it said, "it's an exaggeration." Ludicrous is an exaggeration. I thought,

that's it, that's exactly what we do. It's exactly what we do when we feel the feeling of frustration. We exaggerate our behavior. We don't control it, we exaggerate it. We go out and buy cherry mashes and eat them. We get mad at the person at the stop sign. We honk and honk and honk. We exaggerate our behavior.

My son was three and a half years old and it was in the summer, walking around the house, real hot. He didn't have a shirt on, just his little training pants on, walking around and I'm sitting on the floor and I've got a record player. Remember record players? You know, those things that go around, they have an arm and a needle. I want to pick off some words for a song, because I was supposed to go give a talk, and I wanted to get the words right. So I picked up the needle, and put it on, and I'd write them down, and pick it up and put it back. Mike was sitting right by me, and one time accidentally kind of nudged the record player. The needle scratched. I said, "Mike, Daddy's trying to get these words, so please don't." So I'm writing them down and all of a sudden (scratch). I said, "Michael, Daddy is really trying to get these words." And so now I'm just about there, and he takes his hand and he reaches up to the arm and goes like that and the needle goes (scratch) all over the record. I had never, ever spanked my kids, ever, and I reached back in my frustration and I popped him on the bottom, but I missed his bottom and I hit him in the small of his back, no shirt, and he looked at me with these huge tears. He said, "Daddy, Daddy, that really hurt." And I swore up and down I would never, ever, ever touch my kids again unless I hugged them.

Feel the feelings, but control the behavior. It just adds more stuff to us if we don't. Well, one of the ways, the third thing, is that we can control them. Just kind of flow with it. Life is pretty temporary. This is our moment in history. We do the best we can, and it isn't all that big a deal that we didn't get to go across on the green light, or I forget that person's name. Flow with it. Flow with the circumstances. I don't know much about, I know hardly anything about martial arts, but I understand that judo and karate are pretty resistive, they're force against force, but aikido is kind of flowing with people's balance, they come at you and you flow with it. You keep your own balance, you keep your own stableness here, you're steady, you're solid. So we flow with what's going on around us. We flow with it.

In the New Testament, five times we hear these words. Five times. "Do not lose heart." Do not lose heart. Flow with what goes on around you. Gordon Tasker is a friend of mine. He's in the Kansas Conference, he's now retired, but he and I grew up sort of paralleling each other with churches and when Gordon Tasker was the pastor in Leoti, Kansas, western Kansas community, Leoti, Kansas. His son Steve played football, and Steve was a great football player. Not much better than I, actually. But he was really good and determined and dedicated, committed, and after he finished his high school career in Leoti he went on to college, and he played football in college, and then he got drafted. He got drafted for the professional ranks. The Buffalo Bills drafted Steve Tasker. And in his career as a Buffalo Bill, he was seven times, seven times, and All-Pro on special teams. Seven times he made the all-professional teams. And he said that one year, in 1993, Buffalo was in a playoff game against the Houston Oilers, and he said, "We were behind 35 to 3, and it was a disaster and we were so frustrated, and people were blaming." He

said there was so much blame going around you couldn't believe it. People going up and... "You're not... you missed your block... you didn't get your tackle right... you didn't follow your assignment..." and finally someone said, "Let's let it be like it is. Let's quit resisting, and let's flow with what's happening. Let's do what we know we can do best. Let's live this game like never before, and not blame each other, ever again." And do you know, they made the greatest comeback in NFL history. One of the greatest. Buffalo defeated Houston 41 to 38. They became not the "bickering Bills" as they were called, but the Buffalo team that knew how to deal with their frustrations at that moment.

Well folks, it's all around us. We've got it. Frustration. I guess we just need to feel the feeling and control the behavior, do our best to control the behavior, and one of the ways to do that is to try to flow with things that go on around us. Someone has said that life is really too important to be taken seriously. And we have serious things that happen to us. But in the big picture, life really is too important to be taken seriously. The choir sang today, "Day by day, the God of mercy comforts us in our anxiety." And Peter said, talking about Jesus, "Cast all your anxieties and frustrations on him because he cares for you." He cares for you. And I think that is worth singing about. So let's stand for our closing hymn please.