

Psalm 22:1-7

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

Mark 8:27-33

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

“Courage: Lost and Found”**March 8, 2009****Rev. Charles Schuster**

The last two lines of the 22nd Psalm “Posterity will serve God, future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying, God has done it.” The end of Psalm 22.

Milo Stenson was the Dean of Students at Indiana State University. He called Willis Manfred, the football coach, and he told Willis that star Malcolm Peoples was being thrown out of college because he had cheated on an exam. And the coach asked, “How do you know?” And the Dean answered, “Well, he was sitting next to a straight-A student, and the history prof gave a test with ten questions, and the first nine answers were exactly the same. The coach said, “That could happen.” And the Dean replied, “Yes, that’s true. That could happen. But there was a tenth question, and the A student wrote her answer, she wrote ‘I don’t know.’ And Malcolm Peoples, your star football player, wrote on his paper, ‘I don’t know either.’”

This morning I present to you a Biblical problem, and I don’t know the answer. And the scholars who have written on the subject, they don’t know either. It could go either way. The solution may be to flip a coin. Here’s the problem. Peter said, “Jesus, you’re the Messiah, and you tell us that you’re going to undergo great suffering and that you’re going to be rejected and that you’re going to be killed. This must not happen to you.” And Jesus said, “Get behind me, you devil, you don’t understand anything.” So Jesus

knew he must suffer, and then he did suffer. He was on the cross, and he was heard to say, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He knew he would suffer. He said it had to be. He got after Peter because Peter said it shouldn't happen. He said it had to happen, and then he asked "Why?" See the problem? Did he forget? Did he lose his courage? Or was he quoting the Psalm, the one that began, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and ended, "The future generations will be told about God and will proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying, "God did this.""

Was Jesus quoting the whole Psalm, the Psalm that began in, I would say, concern, cowardice, and ended in courage? And the Roman soldier only heard the first part. "My God, my God, why?" Or did Jesus die afraid? We flip a coin until we get an answer. I don't know for sure. I think, I mean for me, I think he died convinced. For me, I think it was courage on the cross. He quoted the whole Psalm. It was conviction and belief, it was known, he knew how life is, and this morning as the subject is courage, how do we find courage, two things I want to say about courage: First of all, about passive courage. We find courage if we know: to live is to suffer. It's part of life. We take it. We bear it. Jesus knew it. I must suffer. I must be rejected. I must die. Passive courage, just showing up. It's life, we've got to take it, and we've got to brace for it.

Forrester Church is dying, Forrester Church, Frank Church's son. Forrester Church is a Unitarian pastor in New York City, a great preacher, author, he's dying. He doesn't know when, but it's soon, and he's written a book about that. He says, "When I was young, I thought death took courage. I was wrong. Dying takes courage, death doesn't take courage at all. It is love that requires courage. Dare to love, and we instantly become vulnerable. Love another with all of our heart, and we place our heart in jeopardy." And then he said, "Love is grief's advance party." Passive courage means taking life as it comes and living with life as it is, as it acts upon us. Passive courage means we invest ourselves in life, knowing that there is the potential to lose everything we have, but we do it anyway. Passive courage, we face it, we brace for it.

Tony Campallo tells the story of the old guy in the back woods of Kentucky, could be counted upon to show up at all the revival meetings. They brought in the evangelist, the evangelist would preach, the invitation would be given, "Come forward to the front of the church." He would come forward every time there was a revival, he would come forward "Just As I Am" being sung. The old fellow would cry out, "Fill me, Jesus, fill me, fill me." Every year the same. The revival, the old fellow on his knees at the front of the church. Every year, year after year. "Fill me, Jesus. Fill me, fill me." Until one year, someone in the back of the church with a voice that rose about the old hymn shouted so everyone could hear it, "Don't do it, Lord, don't do it - he leaks!"

Face it - we leak. Life is hard. Suffering is part of it. Courage is found as we face it.

The Matterhorn is a mountain between Italy and Switzerland, it stretches very high. Many have tried to climb it. Some have made it, some have not. Some have died. There's

a cemetery in the shadow of the Matterhorn, and there's a marker in that cemetery with these words. "We who lie here scorned the lesser peaks." They faced the mountain. We face life, and it's hard, but we take it. We climb what we can. Isn't it interesting, the study that has been made to see President Obama, been in the office two months, a little less, and his hair is turning gray. And the research suggests that presidents age two years for every year they're in office. Life is hard. Passive courage. Courage it takes to face it, and brace for it. William James said that we should steer safely between the opposite dangers of believing too little and believing too much. Just showing up takes courage. Passive courage. It took courage for David to stand up to Goliath, when he was a young man without armor, and without backup, but he did, as a young man. And we've all got Goliaths we stand up to and it takes courage to face them, but it also took courage, maybe even more courage.... Ken Nicolai, a member of our church, believes for David at the end of his when he knew he could not be for the people what the people needed him to be, so he stepped down, he retired, he withdrew. That took courage as well.

Stephanie Ericsson wrote a book, *Companion Through the Darkness*, after her young husband died unexpectedly. She surely knows the hard side of life. There are moments in the grieving process when we need and want isolation, but there are times when we need the company of people. Given too little isolation, we lose the opportunity to grieve. Given too much isolation, we become depressed and feel separated from the flow of life. Our souls become frozen. Paul Keenan said it, "We listen to the voice of our soul within us. We see life in a different way. We gradually become at home in the new world, even as we're living in the old one, and we live a soulful life, and we are not alone.

Jesus said "My God, my God, I must suffer and die, it's the way it has to be, but God is with me always and forever. I can bear it." It's passive courage. Timothy Keller wrote it in his book, *The Reason for God*, he said, "Our faith, the Christian faith, is aware of the despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture, imprisonment, that will come to us, but on the cross God went beyond our worth human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds any of our own." In the death of Jesus, God suffers and love identifying with the abandoned and the Godforsaken. In the times of doubt when we look for hope, God understands. In those times of confusion when we seek for a sign, God is there. In those times of sadness, when there are tears in our eyes, God comes into the dark night of our soul. When life hits us hard, when the load is heavy, we can bear it and face it and take it, if it has to be. My God, my God, why? Courage, my child. Passive courage.

Secondly, we've got a choice. We have a say in the matter. Courage grows when we learn to take it and make it something more than our own. Active courage. Lou Holtz wrote a book: *Winning Every Day*. Lou Holtz is a football coach, was, commentator. He describes himself as third team, most of his life. Five foot ten, a hundred fifty pounds, thick glasses, the imposing muscular body of a malnourished poster boy. But he feels blessed. And everything that happens to us is the result of the choices we make, he says. And then he tells the story of a private in the Army who pulled KP duty, spent twelve hours peeling potatoes, back to the barracks exhausted, barely could throw himself onto his bed, when he noticed a letter had come from his girl. "Dear John," it said, "if I could

feel your strong muscular arms embrace me one more time, if I could gaze into those big, crystal-blue eyes one more time, if I could taste your sweet tender lips just one more time, I know I could continue to be true.... but....” He never finished that letter, didn’t read any more, jumped from his bed, took off, forgot how tired he was. He had a mission, running off the post, he was doing the hundred-yard dash in nine point five seconds, he approached the guard house. The guard on duty saw him coming, took out his M14 rifle, aimed at John’s heart, “Halt or I’ll shoot.” John never broke stride, yelled back at the guard, “My mother’s dead and in heaven, my father’s dead and in hell, and my girl’s in Chicago, and I’m going to see one of them tonight. Shoot if you must.”

That’s active courage. We take life as it comes, and we make life what we can. We act. We take what is broken and we try to fix it. We take what is wrong and we try to make it right. We take the emptiness and we try to fill it. Dawn Markova has cancer. It’s a wakeup call. She has active courage. She chose to take life and make it work. “I will not die an un-lived life,” she writes, “I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire. I choose to inhabit my days to allow my living to open me, to make me less afraid, to be more accessible, to loosen my heart, until it becomes a wing or a torch. I choose to risk my significance to live so that which came to me as seed goes from me as blossom, and eventually goes on to become fruit. I will not live an un-lived life.” That’s active courage, and it seems clear to any who know the story of Jesus, courage came from a sense of God. He could take the pain of the cross because he knew the love of God. He knew that with God’s help he could take the cross and he could make something from it. There was something bigger than he knew going on, and he was part of it. There was something more important than he suspected, and it was more than just about him. “I must suffer and die, to be raised, to rise again, and if you become my followers,” he said, and this is what followed David’s reading, the next thing he said to them was, “If you become my followers, then you take up your cross and follow.”

This past week Mel Wheatley died. He was our bishop here, 93 years old, he died this week. Before he was a bishop, he was a pastor in California. It was during the Second World War. Japanese Americans were rounded up and put in camps, and were terrorized by American bigots who came as Klan members with their burning crosses and their masks, and Mel Wheatley, pastor of the Westwood church in LA, organized his church to stand with those people in those camps when the mobs came. One family he stayed with, he and Lucille, they had a teenage son named Roy. Roy was so inspired by what those Methodists did that he became a United Methodist, joined the church. More than that, he studied to be a United Methodist pastor. More than that, he got his PhD and became a professor in a seminary, and then was elected bishop, and his first assignment as bishop was, he followed the bishop who had retired, he followed Mel Wheatley here in the Rocky Mountains, Roy Sano. One pastor faced down the crowd, and a young man who became bishop never forgot. Mel Wheatley never told that story. He thought standing up for people was what the church ought to be doing. Roy Sano told that story every chance he had, the story of his friend’s courage. Active courage, it’s contagious.

You take what life gives you and you make of it what you can. Mother Teresa said, “Few of us can do great things but all of us can do small things with great love.” Active

courage means that where there is a will, we find a way. That every problem is a challenge and every challenge is a problem solved, eventually. It means you never stop looking for light in the dark, and if you can't find it, you strike a match and light a candle. It means that you and I are here on this earth because we've got a job to do, an assignment given to us, and it changes daily. Active courage. We take life and make it. Passive courage, we face life and take it. Did Jesus mean it when he said on the cross, "My God, my God, why?" Was it passive courage, take it, face it courage? Did Jesus repeat the whole 22nd Psalm that began in despair and ended in hope, active courage? "I must suffer many things, I take it, I make it what I can, I will rise again." Which was it? I don't know. It doesn't matter. It could have been both. He could have done both. Take it, brace for it, face it, make it what you can. He could have done both. So can we.