

SERMON: FAITH & DOUBT: “A Leap of Faith.”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, March 21, 2021 St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

[Let me ask you this: the last time you were faced with a crisis – health/job/money/relationship, doesn’t matter – what was the first thing you did? Like the archetypal pattern/response to our sin/faults/failings by hiding/ashamed/afraid, our human/DNA/patterning prompts us to default to taking matters into our own hands/thinking/believing that we know better/we’re capable/alone. Just as God knows what we’ve done/where we are/how we feel – God also wants us to trust Him/to go to Him as our first/not last resort...]

The Sunday before Lent started – February 14th/Valentine’s/Transfiguration Day; the celebration of the second affirmation of Jesus’ divine nature/purpose/mission in which Jesus – in a mountain-top encounter – meets with God/Elijah/Moses. I mention this because this type of ‘mountain-top’ experience[*God’s go-to meeting place*] is the type of ecstatic/euphoric/exciting experience that, while exhilarating, is also elusive/fleeting. Present at this transcendent moment were Peter/James/John, who not only witnessed Jesus in His divine-state/“glory”, but heard God proclaim “*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!*”(Mark 9:7) But, as suddenly as that moment started, it ended; it was time to come down from the mountain-top: as they did, despite what they had seen/heard, their doubts/questions about Jesus returned.

[“Ecstatic”/Definition: “feeling of overwhelming happiness/joy/excitement – experience of transcendence” This experience/characterized by sudden/intense/overpowering emotion, and frenzied/rapturous joy! This can spike our natural endorphins/released in the brain/body – changes mood/happy... makes us want it more/elusive.]

Peter, wanting to stay on the mountain-top – in that ecstatic moment – was told that it was time to go/return to face life where it’s lived out: off the mountain/on the ground – where we wrestle with our doubts. John Ortberg, in his book **Faith & Doubt**, called where we live; the “*Valley of If.*” And, as if to reinforce this, on the way down the mountain, Jesus tells the three that He/“*Son of Man, [will] go through many sufferings/be treated with contempt/rejected*” – and, that they too will go through their own struggles/questions/adversity/rejection/fear/doubt: but that, in all things, they were to trust in Him/God – in order to walk through the valley of death/if. “*If*” is not a mountain-top word: it is the wavering/uncertain/hesitant/insecure voiced expression of our fallen/fallible selves – especially when it comes to faith.

[“If”/Definition: “a conditional clause or supposition”/implying the result/effect of something that might/may happen/be true... Not conclusive/decisive/authoritative. “If” is the dog-whistle of doubt/fear: “if I don’t lose my job”/“if my health holds up...”/“if we get through this...”/“if God will forgive me....” “If” is our fear/doubt unvarnished/bare/out in the open:But it is also a word of hope – “if only....” “If” is honest/it’s a ‘leap’ word!]

A quick read through the Gospels will reveal that the word “*if*” appears at the core of most of Jesus’ healing/miracle stories – from the desperate father in Mark Jesus encounters as soon as He’s off the mountain, to Martha grieving at Lazarus’ grave. “*If*” is the desperate plea/cry/letting go of what I/you/each of us hold onto, as we send our prayer into the unknown – and, with it, our ‘iffy’ faith reveals itself for what it is. At the start of Lent I mentioned the father’s ‘doubter’s prayer’/“*I believe, help my unbelief*” – and asked, ‘*How many of us have cried/prayed this prayer?*’ I have/many time/will again – that’s ok:with this prayer we stop hiding behind the lie that we can

reason/rationalize/resolve our way through this life and reach out to the One who knows/understands our “ifs” in hope. This “if” lifts us above our doubts/fears – it takes a leap fueled by hope: And that’s all it takes.

[‘Leap of faith’:often misunderstood:Doesn’t mean choosing to believe an impossible thing/ignore evidence/give up on reason/embrace fantasy:means that one is choosing to commit wholly/fully/totally to something despite the fact that it cannot be proven/is unknown. Any leap of faith is a “leap” because it requires total commitment/no holding back/100% commitment!/made for good reasons/carefully considered – made/committed to in spite of the unknown/our fears/doubts.Proposed to Regan...]

The idea of a “Leap of faith:” was made popular by Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard who argued that God was spiritually different/separate from the physical/material world of man, and could not be understood through science/logic – but by/through faith alone. This ‘leap’ was his way of describing the “free action” of choosing to believe/trust/have faith in a God not based on empirical evidence. As I’ve said: you can’t intellectualize a leap of faith – or by sight/belief – it isn’t something that you think about/choose; it’s something that you act/do/commit to. Saying isn’t believing/even believing isn’t enough:letting go/taking that leap is.

[All think we want certainty/But we don’t:What we really want is trust. Trust is better than certainty because knowing undermines trust, trust=risk/also leads to deeper/intimate relationships – which leads to/builds faith.]

When it comes to faith, we have to take a leap and trust in the hope that we have. There is no logical answer/equation/explanation for grace – or love for that matter – both don’t make sense: neither does the belief that God would love/forgive us. it takes a leap from assent/knowing to devotion/commitment/trust/faith. Left to logic – in the valley of “if’/fear/doubt = death – the arc/bridge of faith/hope is tenuous/unknown until you cross it – but it takes a leap to get across. Amen.