

SERMON: FAITH & DOUBT: *“The Gift of Uncertainty”*

Rev. Geoff Ross Good Friday, April 2, 2021 St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

For the disciples, this day was anything but “Good!” With Jesus’ arrest the night before – at the betrayal by one of their own/for money! – and His being marched across Jerusalem to face the High Priest/Pilate/Herod for a ‘trial’ for sedition/blasphemy/breaking the Sabbath Laws, everything they thought was going to happen – Jesus’ promises of salvation/redemption/release from their captors, earthly/eternal – suddenly didn’t seem true/didn’t seem real: they went from being convinced that He – Jesus/from Nazareth – was the One/Messiah/ Son of God (He even said He was!) to questioning everything from their own decision to ‘follow’ Him to wonder about their own safety. Only days ago, hundreds of singing followers joyfully sang “Hosanna/hosanna!” as Jesus entered Jerusalem; now the same people cried out “Crucify/crucify!” In 24 hours, everything they held to be true/sure/certain had been upended. They uncertain of what to believe in.

[What are you uncertain of?]

With Jesus’ arrest and death on a cross, His disciples were challenged by their fears and doubts – how could our Lord, the Son of Man, the Messiah; die! If He could die – they were next!!! But, in the quiet of their fear, something unexpected happened: God gave them a gift – their faith was hardened by the crucible of fear/grief – out of their doubts their faith grew stronger. In the midst of the horror of the events of Good Friday the disciples – like us – faced their fears/the reality of their uncertainty/wavering/“iffy” faith and came to understand that uncertainty can affirm/reaffirm faith – it forces us to define/declare what it is that we believe/trust in.

[Un-cer-tain-ty: lack of certainty/predictability/reliability/constancy. “Uncertainty” – indecision/hesitancy/wavering/doubt/disquiet/questioning/skepticism – lack of confidence. Doesn’t sound like a ‘gift’ – more like a curse! Yet tilled soil/soul is more pliant/receptive/likely to be fertile/grow/bear fruit.]

Sometimes it seems that it takes life driving us to your knees to get us to look up for God: cossetted in our cocoons of comfort we’ve become numb to the dynamic/creative/healthy benefits of uncertainty/doubt/anxiety/insecurity. One thing I know is; not knowing certainly sharpens the mind/amps up the urgency to know/to be in control/charge:But, when it comes to faith, the only constant is that it is a process of learning/trusting/letting go. Uncertainty is uncomfortable – and we don’t like to be uncomfortable! But life is an exercise in uncertainty – we grow/gain knowledge/know ourselves/others/what we value/want/believe – by wondering/questioning, choosing, risking/hoping - doubting, then committing. As we’ve been learning;Faith is not simply holding beliefs, it is, at its core, about trust. And, trust is an evolving relationship in that it allows for change/adaption/growth.

[Growing hurts/growing pains – process of change/changing into who you became. That’s what uncertainty is = growing from one stage of development/growth/understanding, to another:as you grow, become more comfortable... only to go through it all over again. Growth:painful/awkward/process – not easy/never ends!]

From the vantage point of Easter, the irony of Good Friday – and the actions of the religious/political authorities in crucifying Jesus – is that it galvanized the faith of the same scattered/fearful disciples that they sought to discourage. Jesus' death challenged their faith, but just as metal has to be forged in order to be shaped/hardened, their uncertainty turned into conviction/confidence/certainty: they learned to trust in the power/promises of the God who used their fear/doubts to transform them. Seen this way, uncertainty adds humility to our faith: we realize that we don't have all the answers (beware of those who claim that they do!); that we're not God! Uncertainty also produces character by forcing us to grow/learn/wrestle with our doubts/assumptions: it pushes us to seek what is true/real/trustworthy. The fearful/doubting disciples struggled/wrestled with their faults/failings/imperfections, but if history teaches us one thing: the disciples/apostles didn't do what they did by moving from uncertainty to 'clarity;' they witnessed to their faith in Jesus/God's "good news" of salvation because they moved from uncertainty to trust. And, so can we.

[JO: book FAITH&DOUBT/ "We all think we want certainty. But we don't. What we really want is trust.... And trust leads us to faithfulness/leads into relationships based not on proof/evidence/certainty but on trust/love/commitment.]

As we've heard, faith takes hope/trust – it takes a leap/commitment to something, even though we don't have 100% certainty in our beliefs about it. Living with this uncertainty can be scary/uncomfortable but it will make us more faithful/trusting – accepting that what's essential then is not certainty, but faithfulness, and faithfulness is what matters more to God! If the events of Holy Week/Maundy Thursday/Good Friday are any evidence, it's clear that a life of Faith is not exempt from uncertainty/struggle/fear/doubt... But we can grow in a faith that embraces the uncertainty as a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved, but as a faith that accepts uncertainty as a gift. Amen.