

Sunday, May 26, 2019

Acts 16:9-15

Revelation 21:10,22 to 22:5

John 5:1-9

Comfortable in Faith?

There are many things with which most of us are capable of talking. As Canadians living so close to a river and two lakes, one of our favourite topics is the weather. We're comfortable talking to strangers about this for we might ask the cashier at a store, "What did you think of the storm this morning?" Or to the gas attendant we might say, "Do you think I should have a car wash even with those clouds rolling in?" Or even with an acquaintance we might share our dismay about all of the rain we have had by stating, "I wonder if we'll need a boat like Noah soon?" But why do we do this? Because it is easy comfortable conversation which has no right or wrong answer; it's not debatable or does it even say more than we have something in common so let's chat a little. It is comfortable conversation; comfortable like favourite shoes, or pajamas or even your spot on the couch. As people we often seek comfort because many people experience a lot of discomfort. Not only physical discomfort but unpleasant situations where people do not wish to be or endure. And so be comfortable in the ideal place.

How would you rate your comfort level right now? On a scale from 1 to 5 do you feel comfortable? How you respond depends upon your definition of comfort. Being comfortable can be a physical sensation or a psychological state or both at the same time. When there is a lot of anxiety we might be at 1 because we are wondering and worrying about what is to occur over which we have no control. Yet one may be fully comfortable at 5 because one is fully supported physically there is a sense of comfort which enables us not to worry about anything or anyone. Most people are around 3-4 because if we are totally comfortable we may be sleeping deeply or even close to death. This comfort is mostly physical and psychological in nature, but what about your faith? How comfortable are you in your faith? In your beliefs about God, about the Risen Christ or what you understand to be the work of the Holy Spirit. For many people—it depends upon what is happening in your life because when there is much stress, your comfort levels in talking with and for God change. Just like comfort levels and anxiety change as you listen to or watch a story or program. Remember Jaws and the music which built up to each attack the great white shark- were you ok when you first watched this movie?

I share with you a story of a young bear cub whose mother died soon after his birth. This cub was left to fend for himself and an orphaned cub in that condition is like a walking buffet for predators including mountain lions. So right now you are imagining a bear cub crying out for its mother and in the shadows is a mountain lion.

As the little bear tries to search for food he encounters a giant male black bear. The little cub was overwhelmed by the big bear's size. The larger bear looked around the cub and seemed to realize that the mother bear wasn't anywhere to be found. He gave the little cub a friendly nudge and this bonded the little cub to his new adopted dad. Papa bear proceeded to show the cub how to grub for insects and how to catch fish and how to scratch his back against a tree. Comfort level check—ok?

One day the two bears became separated. The cub began to cry and looked frantically for his new father, but couldn't find him anywhere. The cub approached a stream where he'd learned to fish and something caught his attention. He looked up and saw a mountain lion ready to pounce. That same mountain lion had stalked the cub before and he knew that this cub was usually alone except for the new Papa bear who had disappeared into the bush. There was no way that mountain lion would've gone for that cub with Papa bear around. The mountain lion was pacing back and forth, watching the young cub at the stream as he moved towards the water. Comfort level check—no so good right now, right?

The cub knows that the mountain lion is ready to pounce on him and so having learned from his new Papa about defending himself, he stands up on his back paws to his full height, bares his teeth and lets loose a mighty growl which would have been a truly great sound in the forest but because he was only a cub, it came out like a squawk... comfort level check—worse now—as we physically are concerned about this cub's life.

The mountain lion is at edge of the stream now and he hears the cub but then all of a sudden, the mountain lion lowers his head and runs back into the bush. Only then do we fully see what happened. Yes the cub is in his in his defense position standing tall at the stream. Yet a few yards behind him, at full ferocious height, with sharp teeth bared in a snarl, Papa bear is standing there quietly. And immediately our comfort level moves back to an ok level. For this story tells us that even though the cub couldn't see his father, his father stood guard, protecting his young. The little cub had power available greater than anything he could produce on his own. The father bear was watching and keeping the cub safe and comfortable. For the little cub there was a greater power watching over him.

As we have welcomed Gregory into God's family, not only will Jason and Katie watch over him as he grows up. Gregory already knows and we know that this church family will do so as well. We do this because we have faith and love Jesus for what he has done for us. We believe that Jesus died and rose again not only for us as adults, but for Gregory as well. And as he grows older just like we do, God will show us how to love each other comfortably. And we are going to be challenged in this love because we are going to be tested from time to time about our faith and where we are comfortable. That is, whether we have faith strong enough to combat those negative or evil tendencies that come to us in our everyday life or whether we search out and gain help from others because they have walked this way before.

Jesus was in Jerusalem at one of the city gates where there is a pool on the Sabbath. At this pool are many disabled people—blind, lame, paralyzed and this is where they lived, hoping to receive help from passersby to exist, or even to get close to the water to drink, or clean themselves. One man had been ill and at this pool for 38 years. Jesus saw him and asked if he wanted to be made well. This seems to be an odd question, why wouldn't the man want to be made well? But the sick man answered him, Sir I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." What was this man thinking? This was Jesus offering him healing and he hesitates with an excuse? Maybe he was just comfortable where he was physically, not knowing that his life would change and he could fully live again? Was he too comfortable and searching for a reason not to be healed?

Sometimes we are too comfortable in our faith as well. We know what we believe and yet sometimes we question what others tell us about Jesus. Was Jesus pushing this man to be healed because he wanted to do this on the Sabbath? Just what was foundational to the man's resistance?

Jesus knew that this man had lived by the gate for 38 years and here he offered him healing; to move from what was comfortable to something different which called him to have faith in Jesus. What did he want to happen first or what did he think was needed? Did he want to have a bath before Jesus healed him? Did he think he was unclean before Jesus and those people who were gathered there—unclean and unworthy? Was the pool water going to heal him? Or maybe just maybe his comfort level had gone from complacency to the extreme uncomfortable level that he was just not sure. Jesus did not pay attention to his excuse, but said to him' Stand up, take your mat and walk " He was healed and began to walk. Jesus spoke and healed him and the man did not know it was Jesus.

Today we have experienced the waters of baptism and welcomed a child into God's family. For some of you feeling the water is a little uncomfortable, and for others—the timing for renewing our faith couldn't be better because of the circumstances in which you find your life. Maybe you are so stressed out that feeling the water helps to ground you again. Maybe you needed to hear the story of the big bear who kept silent while the little bear acted on what he had been taught not knowing that the mountain lion saw the daddy bear and walked away. Maybe just maybe you needed to be moved a little bit out of your comfortable spot to consider where you are and how Jesus can heal us with words. Maybe being comfortable in faith means risking a little and standing up for yourself knowing that God the Father is watching over you always. Being comfortable in faith means knowing God whom you believe in and trust and believing and experiencing the love of Christ Jesus as he rose from death for you. Let's take a moment as we consider our faith in God and what God calls us to be and do. Let us pray.

Wonderful God we praise you because you are always watching over us and keeping us safe. Even though we trust in you and thank you for your gift to us in Jesus who died and rose again giving us the gift of eternal life, we need you to push us and move us from the comfortable to risk and be challenged in our faith. Hear these prayers from our hearts as we rejoice in the renewal our faith through the waters of baptism which we have experienced today. IN Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Jesus said, [21] "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."