

Sunday, September 20, 2020

Psalms 105, Philippians 1:21-30 and Luke 9:18-20, 23-24

Living for Jesus

It is a great and wonderful to be able to join together with God's people in faith and with love. But what does being God's people in faith and love really mean? Let us consider what is happening in our world today. A global pandemic that started in China in November 2019 and has created lockdowns around the world and in many areas which opened up are now locked down again because of an emerging high number of cases. Fires that are covering much of the western coast of the US and with smoke blowing across the country and over the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. Floods in some areas of North America which have not seen flooding before or because of hurricanes and torrential rain. And then there is the economic problems being felt by countries around the world because people have been and were not able to leave home to work, to spend money socializing or even just do things beyond getting groceries and necessary items. Many small businesses are on the verge of closing and this has led to high unemployment rates. With no money many families instead of donating to foodbanks have received assistance. There has been government financial support for many people in order to keep cash flow but in some situations this money has led to further problems with drug addictions. It seems that there is something happening in every corner of the world and what is prevalent is worry and fear of what tomorrow will bring.

If I were to ask you what are the concerns or anxieties, you have in this moment we might list some of the things mentioned above. We might also add the concerns we have for schools being open and how effective online learning is when we as people of all ages, need to engage each other and build up relationships. What are the things we are wondering about and thinking about? We are aware that there have been sayings that with all the things happening in our world, we should take note as they are the signs of the end times. Yet it was on Friday that I saw a baby snuggled to its mother only 3 weeks old. If this is end times, what does life hold for that child and those families expecting now? We must remember that God promised us not to destroy the Earth again and that we are called to live in faith and with hope for a better tomorrow.

In our reading from Psalm 105 it states that we are to give thanks and call on God and to make known what God has done. So what has God done? The psalmist writes that people turned to God for help, in order to experience His presence and to remember the promises God

made. We remember the story of Moses and how God led his people to the promised land where they would keep God's laws and obey his teachings. But the problem was that these laws and teachings were not always kept or obeyed. This not only happened when they arrived and became a nation unto themselves, this happens now as people have turned away from God. Yet what is most important is that God did not stop caring for people ever!

God created people to live and love others supporting each other in times of crisis and celebration. Yet here we are 6 months into a pandemic and we wonder what is happening to our world and even question where God is. Many people are worried about what will happen not if the second wave hits, but when it hits. Many people are worried about how we might live into the future and even are worried about how everyone will get home for Christmas. But I ask you this- where is your faith? Where is God's Spirit in you?

Jesus had been praying by himself with the disciples close by. When he finished praying, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Jesus wanted to know what the word on the street or in the synagogue or market about what people thought of him. He had recently fed a large crowd of people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. And he wanted to hear what people thought about him. The disciples responded- John the Baptist, but others Elijah and still others one of the ancient prophets has arisen. The crowd would have known John the Baptist because he did prepare them for Jesus' coming into the world. The prophet Elijah had taught that a messiah would come to save the people. The ancient prophets, the ones whose words we know as recorded in the Old Testament all focused on the coming of the Christ, the one who would save His people as Lord. Jesus heard these stories shared from the street and then instead of gathering more general information he asked those around him, But, who do you say that I am? Whenever one uses the word 'but' we have to pause a moment. This little word changes the focus of the conversation from what the crowds have shared with the disciples to what follows. Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?" He introduced a phrase or clause or question which contrasts what has already been mentioned and asks them what they say. It is Peter who responds "The Messiah or Christ of God."

Peter did not need to think about this, google possible answers, consult the rest of the disciples and then give a response, he said. "You are the Messiah/ Christ of God. You are the One God sent to save us. "

In these last weeks we have had many times to reflect, think and wonder. We have also had time to ask, 'what if' questions. So, what if you were sitting where you did not know

anyone and one of the people asked, "Who do you think Jesus is?" How would you respond? Possible answers would include- God's Son, Saviour, teacher, Christ or even messiah. But I use this word carefully, but do any of these answers describe your relationship with Jesus? Just reflect for a moment. When you introduce family members you will state, 'This is first name' and then my wife/husband/son, daughter/friend to show your relationship with them. So when I ask who do you think Jesus is? How would you respond? Jesus, God's Son- My Saviour, teacher, friend and Christ. And when you respond this way, your relationship is made clear with Jesus.

Jesus listened carefully to these words of Peter and his disciples and then he told them don't tell anyone that I am the Messiah, because he knew that he needed to die and rise again. However, the disciples didn't really get this part until later on. Jesus tries to explain what being in relationship with him would and does mean. He states, "If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."

What did Jesus mean? Jesus was telling the disciples the means by which he was going to die—on the cross. They did not understand but we do because we have heard this story of what happened after Jesus was arrested and as he walked through the streets of Jerusalem in pain and agony carrying the cross upon which he would die. For our understanding, to take up the cross of Christ means to live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. To walk the way Jesus taught and to live as he lived. Paul told the Philippians that this involves standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel and not being intimidated by those who oppose you.

How often do others ask you about what is happening in the world and questioning how God can let it happen when most of what occurs just happens or has resulted from circumstances away from us. God has given us a privilege and a responsibility as faithful followers of Jesus. The privilege is not only believing in Jesus but suffering for him as well. So what are we suffering from in these moments? We seem to be fed, have clean water, clothes to wear, a place to gather to worship, and the ability to be with friends whose focus is Jesus. Yet many of us are anxious and we worry. One thing that we can do is to learn to wait to worry. Many of our anxieties are based on imaginations not facts. If you wait until you actually have a reason to worry than you can do something about it- but not what might happen.

Jesus knew that he was going to die on a cross. He tried to tell the disciples that he would die on the cross. He was probably anxious about this, but he also knew it was not yet

time. And when he worried, he prayed earnestly and more often. He worried but it was through prayer that his anxieties and concerns were shared with God and Jesus' focus became clear again.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strength." We do not know what the next few months will bring regarding the world and its people. All we do know is that we can rely on Jesus to help us through these days. Our faith enables us to turn to God for strength for each day and to have hope for tomorrow.

Paul stated that he had struggles like the people of the church in Philippi. He tells the Philippian believers to live their lives in the manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Live for Jesus. How do we do this today amidst all the things that seem to influence and tear the world and its people apart? We strive to please Him in all that we do, to follow him and submit ourselves to him and then searching for others who are needing him love and his grace too. Living for Jesus is like how he lived by praying, caring and sharing of oneself. It means listening to the needs of others and sharing in compassion and praying with those who need to be comforted and strengthened. It means offering and giving oneself in the service of others. It is the response we make after we say we believe that Jesus died and rose again for us. It means that Christ lives in us and we live for him. God hear these words as we offer them to you. Let us renew our faith as we live for Jesus in all that we do. AMEN

An older hymn "Living for Jesus", includes these words - *O Jesus Lord and Saviour, I give myself to Thee, For Thou in Thy atonement Didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne; My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for Thee alone.* (HFG 462).