

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT B
INCARNATION LUTHERAN CHURCH**

A GOD MOMENT

SATURDAY A WEEK AGO NOW, I WAS LAZING AROUND THE HOUSE TRYING TO FIGHT OFF A RESPIRATORY INFECTION WHEN I DECIDED TO TAKE A LOOK AT MY SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD. IT LOOKED PRETTY BUSY - SO I DECIDED TO DO A LITTLE STUDYING OF THE TEXTS FOR TODAY. - THIS FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - AND AS I READ THE LESSONS THE THEME JUST JUMPED OUT AT ME.. STIR UP YOUR POWER AND COME! A LAMENT, A PLEA FOR GOD TO RETURN AND SAVE GOD'S PEOPLE ONCE MORE. IT'S THERE IN THE ISAIAH TEXT - "O THAT YOU WOULD OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN... " ONE COMMENTARY CALLS THESE VERSES A COMMUNAL PRAYER OF CONFESSION - AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF OUR HUMAN FRAILTIES AND SIN AND A PRAYER OF LONGING FOR A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. THE PRAYER AS WE LIT THE FIRST CANDLE OF OUR ADVENT WREATH ASKS GOD TO" ROUSE US FROM OUR SLEEP, THAT WE MAY BE READY WHEN OUR LORD COMES..." IN THE SECOND READING PAUL SPEAKS A WORD OF HOPE TO A DISCOURAGED CONGREGATION IN CORINTH, LONGING FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS.

“HE WILL ALSO STRENGTHEN YOU TO THE END, SO THAT YOU MAY BE FOUND BLAMELESS.”

MARK’S GOSPEL COMES TO US FROM THE 13TH CHAPTER – THE CHAPTER KNOWN AS “THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE” WHERE JESUS HIMSELF SPEAKS TO HOW THAT SECOND COMING WILL BE AND ADMONISHES US TO BE ALERT, TO KEEP AWAKE BECAUSE NO ONE, NOT EVEN JESUS HIMSELF, KNOWS THE DAY NOR THE HOUR. IT’S ALL THERE – THAT SENSE OF THE ABSENCE OF GOD AND THE LONGING FOR GOD TO RETURN.

SO, NEXT I TURNED TO ANOTHER OF MY FAVORITE RESOURCES, NOT DAVID LOSE THIS TIME, BUT THE “PREACHER” EDITION OF SUNDAYS AND SEASONS – THE PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR WORSHIP PLANNING FOR ELCA CONGREGATIONS. EACH WEEK, BOTH A SCHOLAR AND A PREACHER PROVIDE THOUGHTFUL MATERIAL ON THE TEXTS FOR THE DAY. THIS TIME I FOUND THE SCHOLAR’S WORDS PARTICULARLY HELPFUL. HE SEES THE OVERARCHING THEME OF THESE TEXTS AS ONE OF FAITHFULNESS. BOTH ISAIAH AND CORINTHIANS SPEAK OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO HUMANKIND AND MARK’S GOSPEL SHIFTS THE FOCUS TO HUMANKIND’S FAITHFULNESS

TO GOD. SO, HE WRITES, WE HAVE TWO QUESTIONS BEFORE US THIS WEEK.

- 1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD?**
- 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GOD TO BE FAITHFUL TO US?**

SO, THINKING I REALLY HAD MY FOCUS FOR TODAY 'S SERMON, I DECIDED TO STRETCH OUT ON THE COUCH AND READ A NOVEL. BUT THEN, A GOD MOMENT HAPPENED. I GOT A TEXT FROM BARRY.

BARRY AND HIS FAMILY AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF WALKING TOGETHER THROUGH SOME DIFFICULT TIMES FOR BARRY IN HIS YOUNGER YEARS. HE WAS STRUGGLING WITH SO MUCH – HIS IDENTITY, HIS FAITH, HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE. THOSE WERE TOUGH TIMES, BUT TIME WENT BY. BARRY REACHED A POINT OF HEALING AND I MOVED ON TO ANOTHER CALL IN MY LIFE. NOT SO LONG AGO, AFTER A NUMBER OF YEARS, BARRY AND I RECONNECTED ON FACEBOOK –BUT NOT IN A PERSONAL WAY. JUST LIKES – NOW AND AGAIN – ESPECIALLY AS HE POSTED PICTURES OF HIS NEW PUPPY. BUT THEN, THE GOD MOMENT.

BARRY'S TEXT ASKED IF WE HAD ATTENDED THE FUNERAL FOR PASTOR STEVERN LORIMER, A RETIRED PASTOR OF BARRY'S HOME

CHURCH. WE HAD PLANNED TO – BUT NEITHER OF US FELT WELL ENOUGH TO GO, I TOLD HIM. WE KEPT EXCHANGING TEXTS AND IIN ONE OF THEM BARRY SAID TO ME, “YOU WILL ALWAYS BE ONE OF MY PASTORS.” AND I SHARED WITH HIM THAT I STILL HAVE A NOTE HE WROTE ME ABOUT “GRACE NOTES” IN HIS LIFE. THAT LED TO THIS FROM HIM, “YOU KNOW, I NEVER GOT TO BE A PASTOR (ONE OF THOSE ISSUES HE WAS STRUGGLING WITH), BUT I BELIEVE I AM A CHAPLAIN TO MY FRIENDS. “ AND THEN IN A FEW MINUTES, BARRY TEXTED, “I’M SENDING YOU SOMETHING I WROTE IN 2013.” I READ IT – AND TODAY’S SERMON ALL FELL IN PLACE. “WELL, I SAID TO HIM, “IF YOU CAN GET TO COLUUMBIA ON DECEMBER 3, I CAN MAKE YOU PASTOR FOR THE DAY” - BECAUSE, YOU SEE, BARRY’S WORDS REFLECT EXACTLY THE STRUGGLE WE ALL HAVE – IN OUR OWN WAYS – WITH THESE TWO QUESTIONS WE HAVE BEFORE US TODAY. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD? AND - WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GOD TO BE FAITHFUL TO US? LISTEN.

(BARRY)

AND THERE IT IS – OUR HUMAN STRUGGLE TO STAY FAITHFUL TO GOD REFLECTED IN TODAY’S READINGS AND IN BARRY’S WRITING. – OUR PLEA FOR GOD TO COME DOWN AND SAVE US! WE DO STRUGGLE, WE

DO DOUBT, WE DO CRY OUT IN ANGER AND IN PAIN, WE DO LONG TO SEE GOD, TO FEEL GOD'S PRESENCE. WE LONG TO BELIEVE, EVEN WHEN, MOST ESPECIALLY WHEN, WE CAN'T SEE, FEEL, TOUCH GOD. YET SOMEHOW, YOU KNOW, WE KEEP SEARCHING BECAUSE AS ST. AUGUSTINE WROTE MANY, MANY YEARS AGO NOW"THOU HAST MADE US FOR THYSELF, O LORD, AND OUR HEART IS RESTLESS UNTIL IT FINDS ITS REST IN YOU." OUR FAITHFULNESS IS FOUND IN OUR SEARCHING.

BUT HERE'S THE THING. EVEN THOUGH WE DOUBT AND QUESTION THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE WORLD - IN OUR LIVES - GOD IS THERE - BECAUSE, YOU SEE, GOD'S PRESENCE DOESN'T DEPEND ON OUR FEELINGS BUT SOLELY ON GOD'S PROMISE TO BE WITH US ALWAYS. AND THAT'S THE ANSWER TO THAT SECOND QUESTION. HOW DOES GOD STAY FAITHFUL TO US? GOD STAYS FAITHFUL TO US NO MATTER WHAT. NO MATTER HOW FAR WE ROAM, NO MATTER HOW ANGRY WE GET, NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE CRY OUT IN PAIN, NO MATTER WHAT - GOD'S THERE - IN THE BUSH, ON THE PATH, IN THE VOICE - AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, GOD'S THERE - ON A CROSS - DYING SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE NOW AND FOREVER AS GOD'S BOY,

**GOD'S GIRL, GOD'S MAN, GOD'S WOMAN -NO MATTER WHAT. GOD'S
FAITHFULNESS IS FOUND IN GOD'S GRACE.**

GOD MOMENTS...GRACE NOTES...AMEN.