

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
February 1, 2015

Psalm 111
Mark 1:21-28
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

KIDS' MESSAGE - "The Falcon" (Based upon a fable by Leo Tolstoy, taken from "Stories for Telling, A Treasury for Christian Storytellers" by William R. White, Augsburg, Mpls., 1986.)

A rich lord had a falcon who he had trained very carefully. It was a splendid bird that was obedient to his master's every command.

One day the lord and a host of his servants went hunting. When the falcon caught his first rabbit, the lord stroked the bird lovingly. Then, being thirsty, he began to search for water. He soon found an old spring on a hillside where the water trickled out of the earth a drop at a time... The lord held his cup under the spring and waited until it was nearly full. As he brought the cup to his mouth, the falcon flapped his wings, spilling the water.

The lord scolded the bird and again placed his cup under the spring. He waited a long time until the cup finally filled. When he began to drink a second time, the falcon landed on his wrist, causing the water to spill on the ground. This time he scolded the bird in a louder voice.

When the lord was able to fill his cup a third time the falcon again caused him to spill the water. The lord became so angry that he struck the bird with all his might, killing it instantly.

This time the lord sent a servant to draw water from the spring. He soon returned with an empty cup. "**Sir,**" he began, "**the water is not fit to drink. There is a dead snake in the spring and it has poisoned the water. If you had drunk the water you would have died.**"

The lord hung his head. "**The falcon saved my life, and in anger I killed him for it,**" he said weeping.

Kids, who died to save our lives? Jesus! If Jesus loves us that much, how do we treat him? Do we hurt Jesus? Do we forget Jesus? Do we thank Jesus? Do we love Jesus back? Today we are loving Jesus back together. I know that makes Jesus very happy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

An old fisherman was making his way home after a long day on the sea. It was pitch black out as he followed a familiar road that ran alongside a river. As he made his way through the darkness, he thought to himself, **“Someday I will be rich and have a fine house and carriage and many servants.”** This was a dream that he had had for a long time.

Suddenly his foot struck something on the road beneath him. Bending down, he touched a little bag. As he picked it up, he could tell that it was full of little rocks. Without further thought, he continued to walk along the trail and absentmindedly, one by one, threw the rocks into the nearby river. **“Someday, I’ll be rich.”** And he threw a rock into the river. **“Someday, I will have a fine carriage.”** And he threw a rock into the river. **“Someday, I will have a big house.”** Another rock. **“Someday I will have many servants.”** Another rock. Finally, just as he prepared to toss the last rock into the river, a lamp from a passing carriage cast a little light onto his hand. There he saw sparkling a most beautiful stone. It was a ruby. While dreaming one day of being wealthy, that man threw away a fortune. **Everything he wanted, he already had.** And he didn’t even know it...

That is your story and mine. **Everything we need, we already have.**

In **Psalm 111**, we hear, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** **“Fear”** doesn’t mean being terrified that God will strike us down. Fear of God means being in the **proper relationship** with God. God is God and we are the work of God’s hands. We are not God. We would not exist were it not for God. We were made to be in a relationship with God where we worship, love, obey and revere God. **“Awesome God, you give me life. I owe everything that I have to you God. Thank you God!”**

In that same passage, the ancient psalm writer starts out by singing praise to the amazing God that we have.

- **“Great are your works.”** – God has gifted us with food, land, faithfulness and justice. If something in our life is good, it has come to us from the hand of God.
- **“Your righteousness endures forever.”** - Five times we hear **“forever”** in this psalm. God doesn’t just **“stop by”** in our lives once in a while. God is **faithfully present** to care for us for now, for always and forever.

- **“You are gracious and full of compassion.”** – Grace is a **“good gift that we don’t deserve.”** God loves, cares, forgives and heals us not because we deserve it, but because we **belong to God.** God cares for us as a loving parent cares for their precious and needy child. You are a child of God.
- **“You remember your covenant forever.”** – **“Covenant”** means agreement, contract or **promise.** God remembers the promise that God made to us **forever.** And what is that promise? First **God created us, loved us into life, gifted us** with **God self** and this **amazing world,** and then gave us this covenant/promise:
 1. Love and trust me to take care of you.
 2. Love and care for each other and the world.

The psalmist concludes, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** This is **not a threat.** It is a **promise.** God gives us life and all of its blessings. God gives us the people that enrich our lives. God gives us God self on a cross. Jesus dies so that we might be forgiven again and again for not trusting God. Jesus sets us free to simply live our lives to the fullest in the free gift of God’s unfailing, never-ending love.

It is knowing that God will be there for us in the:

- Deer stand and stuck in the 40 degrees below ditch,
- On the mountain top and in the car accident,
- At the birth of our baby and in our nursing home room,
- At our wedding and in divorce court,
- At our Thanksgiving feast and when we pick up our food stamps...

Believing that God will always be there for us is the source of life, hope and joy! Our God has promised to be there for us in **our most amazing moments** and in the **deepest, darkest parts of our brokenness.**

“Brokenness?” In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus shows up at the local synagogue, the Jewish equivalent of our sanctuary/church. Jesus finds there a man who is possessed by some sort of demon. Was it epilepsy? Alzheimer’s? Drug addiction? PTSD? Cancer? We know something more about demons **now** with all of our medicine, psychology and sociology than those folks did **back then.**

Jesus performs his first miracle in the Gospel of Mark. Last week, earlier in this first chapter, the **heavens are ripped open** as God’s Holy Spirit comes into this world. This week, God in Christ, **rips into the power of evil.**

Jesus here announces in word and deed that God will do battle with anything/anybody that tries to hurt God's people or to separate them from God, from each other or from God's creation.

Jesus commands the demon to "**Be silent, and come out.**" Jesus doesn't eliminate evil and oppression, but instead denies those kinds of forces the authority/power to hold ultimate sway over people's lives. Jesus is about the work of liberating people from the powers that try to keep them from flourishing in God's world.

Do you see it? There are demons among us as we gather for worship here this morning. We are not a bunch of zombies who hang on God's puppet strings with our lives all ordered just exactly the way that God would like them to be. We are human beings, marvelously created by God, but free to get ourselves into all kinds of trouble. And free to be victimized by whatever evil might happen to come down the pike. God created us with hearts and minds and voices, hands and feet. God invites us to let God be our God, to let God walk with us always, to trust God to love and care for us. "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**" Real life is born out of us clinging to the promise that **we are God's precious children**, that **God is our faithful parent** and that nothing can separate us from God's love which is ours in Jesus who battles to give us freedom, hope and joy!

Sitting here in this "sanctuary," this place set aside for God's people, we have:

- Haunting questions in our minds,
- Paralyzing fears in our souls,
- Doubts and sometimes even despair in our hearts...

And we have a God who is here with us. And out there with us. Did you see it in our Gospel text? Jesus comes into worship and though nobody else knew that he was God, the demons knew. Evil knows who Jesus is and wants nothing to do with him. And to this very day, Jesus still says to the demons that try to control our lives, "**Be silent, and come out.**"

Everything you need, you already have. Life isn't about wealth, or power, fame or success. Life is about being in **a love-trust relationship with God, neighbor and creation.** You need God. God has already given God self to you. "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**" "**Wisdom.**" God has promised never to let you go or to give up on you. **Welcome** God's loving presence in your life. **Rest** in God's

compassionate and merciful arms. **Draw on the power** of the Holy Spirit to rise up and live each day to the fullest in God's world.

Ask your questions. God is ready to hear them. **Cry out your objections** to the way that the world is. God may well agree with you. **And you can give up on God**, but God won't give up on you. And when you finally realize **how good it is to be loved and cared for by God**, God will be ready to receive **your own love, thankfulness and praise in return**. Then live each and every day in the assurance that you are loved and precious in the eyes of God. The last verse in our psalm reads, **"God's praise endures forever."** I think that that means God will always be deserving of praise. And I think it means that God's people will be there to live in God and to praise God forever.

Dan Haasken and his son, D.J., are attending adult membership class together. We've been talking about how God is not sitting off in heaven, distant from our lives. We've been talking about God literally carrying us in our darkest moments, even death. Two weeks ago, Dan sent me this email. I use it with his permission.

"Hi Pastor Darrell, After our confirmation and new member gathering last night I remembered this poem below that was included in a funeral program of my best friend from my younger days, who took his own life this past October for seemingly no reason that anybody can think of. Everything in his life seemed to be just perfect or normal to everyone who knew him including his wife. I just thought it fits in well with what we were discussing last night. I'm not sure if you've ever heard this poem or not but thought I'd pass it along in case you haven't.

Thanks, Dan"

Here's the poem that Dan attached.

Footprints in the Sand

One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. After the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints. This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it. **"Lord, you said once I**

decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you the most, you would leave me.” He whispered, **“My precious child, I love you and will never leave you, never, ever during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”**

Here's what I wrote back.

“Dan, thanks for your response to class last night. I am sorry for the loss of your best friend. This is surely another one of many unexplained losses that we witness in our lives and world. Lutherans believe that even suicide can't rip us away from God and God's love for us. Suicide is just further proof that we can't take care of ourselves and desperately need a loving, compassionate, forgiving and life-giving God.

“Footprints in the Sand” is a wonderful picture of God's faithfulness and presence in our lives. I actually have a framed copy of this poem hanging on the wall in my home. It has helped me many times.”
Pastor Darrell

Dear Child of God, **everything you need, you already have.** What are you going to do with it? Amen.