

## "FINDING HOPE"

Sunday, April 25, 2021

A sermon by Cathy Love

Daniel 3:16-29

### **Children's Story**

This is song tells a story about a singer, who shares with us his personal struggles to sing God's praises when life is hard, when you are held to the flame so to speak. The words remind us it is ok to have bad times and to struggle with your ability to praise God in the hard times but the song is also a reminder that God loves us and he will be there to see us through the good and bad times. When God choses to leave mountains immovable, we need the strength to hold fast to our faith and to find hope because we sometimes can't figure out where God is.

For those of you who are on the phone, most of the video shows different views of a stage from a concert hall and the lighting around the stage. When the song refers to the mountains, views of the mountains are played around the walls of the stage. But the visual of the video is not what is important to the message. I ask that you hear the words of the song and then I will share the message of the composer and what caused him such pain as to say, he just can't give the message that it will be alright.

### **Even if by Mercy Me**

They say sometimes you win some, sometimes you lose some  
and right now, right now I'm losing bad.

I've stood on this stage night after night reminding the broken it'll be alright  
but right now, oh right now I just can't.

It's easy to sing when there's nothing to bring me down, but what will I say  
when I'm held to the flame like I am right now.

I know You're able and I know You can save through the fire with Your mighty hand,  
but even if You don't my hope is You alone.

They say it only takes a little faith to move a mountain.

Well good thing a little faith is all I have, right now, but God,  
when You choose to leave mountains unmovable, oh give me the strength to be able to sing,  
It is well with my soul.

I know You're able and I know You can save through the fire with Your mighty hand,  
but even if You don't my hope is You alone.

I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt would all go away if You'd just say the word,  
but even if You don't my hope is You alone.

You've been faithful, You've been good; all of my days Jesus, I will cling to You.  
Come what may 'cause I know You're able, I know You can.

I know You're able and I know You can save through the fire with Your mighty hand;  
But even if You don't my hope is You alone.

I know the sorrow, I know the hurt would all go away if You'd just say the word,  
But even if You don't my hope is You alone.

It is well with my soul. It is well, it is well with my soul.

Did you hear the link from this song to the song from Reverend Frances' sermon last week? She talked about the song "It is Well with my Soul" and the struggles of the composer, Horatio Spafford.

Do you recall his son died at the age of 4, he lost his business in the great Chicago fire of 1871, his business interests were further damaged by the economic downturn in 1872, he sent his family ahead of him to England only to have his daughters all perish when their ship was involved in a collision and sank and only his wife survive? On his way to be with her, as he crossed near to the area his daughters had died, he wrote, it is well with my soul. Oh to have such faith!

**Prayer:**

Zealous God, we confess, like your people Israel, that we tire of being "the chosen. "Could you not just leave us alone every once in a while?" Sometimes this "Christian stuff" gets a bit much. Life goes on and we have lives to live. Yet, unrelenting, you refuse to leave us alone. You are, after all, a zealous God. You startle us from our reveries by gathering us into your dream time, into your church. May we, thus gathered, be so inspired by your Spirit that our lives never tire, that we have the energy now to wait, to rest, in the goodness and beauty of your truth. Amen.

(Prayers plainly spoken. Stanley Hauerwas / © 2003 Wipf & Stock Publishers)

**Message:**

Last week, Frances gave a message about being witnesses. She told some stories of struggle and faith. This leads nicely into today's message.

Today, my inspiration came from the music video we played during the children's story, "Even If" by Mercy Me and the message behind the video.

I often wonder, as many of you know, what is the story behind the song? Sometimes when you look at others, the famous people, people like this singer, you wonder what could possibly be wrong in their lives. They sing their faith and are famous for it. What could be hard about that?

Maybe you secretly envy people who seem to have it all together when you feel like your whole world is falling apart.

As a Christian, I am often challenged with people asking where God is in times of trouble. I remind them that being a Christian does not give you a pass from pain and suffering, but it gives you a place to turn for the strength to get through whatever the challenge and it is a promise that you are never alone.

Yes, I have cried out to God in pain and yes, I have been angry with Him. A former Minister once told me it was ok to be mad at God because God has broad shoulders. The rest of that important message to me was God was there and I was reaching out to Him in my pain and keeping my faith.

Maybe it isn't you that is suffering but someone you love or care about. In these times, it is harder to know other people's struggles, so we need to work hard to keep in touch.

But let's go back to the message behind the song Even If.

This song came about to describe the helplessness Bart Millard had in dealing with a child who had a chronic illness. In several interviews I watched, his message is the same: He explains when he stands up on the stage, a lot of times people think he is supposed to have it all together, he has

the answers, that he walks around hovering two inches off the ground and God is good. He says it is not the case.

There are some days, he doesn't want to stand up there and tell you it is going to be ok we have all had bad days and there are days he just can't do this anymore. He states sometimes life sucks and to act like bad times don't exist is a waste of everyone's time.

He has 5 kids. At the time of this interview, his oldest son was 15 and was diagnosed at the age of 2 with type 1 diabetes. He explains chronic illness never goes away. You have good days and bad days and, on this particular day, Bart was having a bad day.

It was his son's 6 month check-up. He doesn't really remember everything about that day except the knowledge that this thing is real, and your life revolves around it. His son by this time had experienced 37,000 shots in his life. He says, "You feel, as a parent, you could have done better." I am willing to bet I am not the only other parent who has had that thought.

A dear friend of theirs, a Christian woman met them that day and asked about the diabetes. She said she was going to pray for God to heal his son. He was mad. He was sarcastic. Even as a Christian, he was having a bad day. His Church says, "God is Good all the time" and he said he wanted to grab them by the shoulders and tell them "really a healing for my son? Like I've never thought of that in 13 years."

God could heal his son but for some reason he was not. Then he changes his emotions and states "But that is ok." He talks about how his son is going to change the world as a diabetic.

There are times that it doesn't feel ok and like Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego, he says he wants to have the courage to stand in front of the firing furnace and say "I know God can deliver us but, even if he does not, I am not going to surrender, or bow because He is worth it. If I forget who I am, He doesn't forget me. There are times I want to give up but the only way I can continue to go through this, is because of what Christ has already done. No circumstance will change who I am in Christ. It can try and sometimes it seems like it is going to win. Regardless of what we go through He is bigger. We have to believe this with all our hearts or otherwise what are we doing?"

He states even if God went silent and never said another word, He is still worthy to be praised, He is our greatest hope in the midst of trial.

What do we say when we are being held to the flame, how do we hold on to our faith, how do we continue to pray when everything seems so very hopeless? Haven't we all had those times when, despite our strong faith and convictions, our faith in God waivers, or we struggle to understand what is happening. We hold on, sometimes by a thin thread, to our faith as we work through the process of such serious issues.

We, as a faith community are so blessed and yet we may not know it. As Bart said I know what God is capable of, but even if he doesn't, I am still not going to bow, he is still worthy to be praised, he is still my hope because of what he has already done for me. God is the only one who has prepared me for these circumstances.

God sometimes works in our lives in ways we find difficult to understand. There may be situations where we are unable to see any good or positive outcomes.

But the Bible encourages to have faith that God is still working for good in ways we cannot see. Where do you find hope when life is hard?

We have so many places to turn to find reassurance that God is with us. Look at these Bible passages:

**Psalm 37:23**

A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?

**1 Corinthians 10:13**

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

**Psalm 20 verse 1**

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

**Psalm 34:19**

The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.

**Psalm 46:1**

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

**Psalm 57:1**

Have mercy on me, my God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me.

**2Corinthians 4: verses 8 – 9**

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.

**2Samuel 22 verses 3 – 4**

My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior-from violent people you save me. I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise and have been saved from my enemies.

One of my favourites is **Matthew 6:34** - although it is hard to follow at times: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

And there are so many more. Have you searched for your faith verses?

Do you recognize some of the songs that have been created from these passages which are also meant to provide solace and comfort? Do you have specific songs or hymns that give you peace? That offer you comfort? Have you ever looked at their histories? So many songs we listen to are born out of someone's personal trials and tribulations.

We already talked about It is Well with My Soul. What a story of faith that one was!!

I gave you the brief history of A Mighty Fortress and Jesus Loves Me earlier this morning and I will add just one more song for this morning.

Charlotte Elliott was suffering from ill health and was hardened by her disability. She railed against God saying if he loved her, He would not have treated her this way. Visited by a Swiss minister Dr. Cesar Malan, he spoke to her after one of her violent outbursts and told her his cure, which she was seeking, was “the faith you are trying to despise”. She asked how she would become a Christian and share the peace and joy he possessed, he explained to give herself to God just as she was. She replied “I would come to God just as I am? Is that right?” She found God and held John 6:37 as a special verse “he who comes to me I will by no means cast you out”.

She later wrote this song as a poem for a fundraiser. Although she never enjoyed good health, she wrote about 150 hymns of faith.

There are so many people who have suffered various ills on earth but have given us hope in their statements.

- Mother Theresa is said to have stated **“I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much.”** If Mother Theresa can feel like this, I can forgive myself for feeling overwhelmed sometimes.
- There are many versions of this optimistic view from Billy Graham: **‘Don't let failure or disappointment cut you off from God or make you think that the future is hopeless. When God closes one door, He often opens another door - if we seek it.’**
- Or, this version by Yasmin Mogahed that also directs you where to look in times of trial **“When your failures surround you, and all the open doors have closed, look up. There’s a door that never closes, a way, when all the other ways have failed you.**
- Helen Keller has these wise words **“A happy life consists not in the absence, but in the mastery of hardships.”**
- Elbert Hubbard points out **“God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas but for scars.”** I feel many of us will have many scars which our God will heal.
- Corrie ten Boom’s message of faith is **“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”**
- Soren Kierkegaard explains the function of prayer as being **not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.”**
- And Max Lucado tells us **“Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right.”** ([He Still Moves Stones: Everyone Needs a Miracle](#))

- And despite the trial and tribulations we experience, Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us, **“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”**

There are books to read and devotions to follow. Other ways to rejuvenate ourselves include going outside, sitting with people we know, looking for the smallest blessings and working our way to bigger ones.

One person I know said she felt closer to God in the woods than in a Church. That was where she turned during her struggles. There are so many individual ways to cope and places to find God.

And, here at Calvin, we have so many strong, faithful people who will support you and pray for you if you just let them know you are struggling from Reverend Frances to the groups or teams to which we belong to individuals in the Church. You may also have friends or family who will walk with you through your pain whether it is due to physical pain or emotional pain.

Yes, other people’s lives are busy. They may appear happy or successful compared to your struggles but without knowledge, there can be no help. I have personally reached out to people in times of need and had a wonderful response.

Some people were going through a similar situation and we walked the path together, some were able to pray for me and whomever else needed the prayers. Just knowing someone is taking time to pray for me or for someone I care about gives me such comfort.

And of course, the main option is personal prayer. God is always there for you and if we still our minds and hearts, we will hear His promise to us. The secret is to hear His message, not the message you think or that you want to hear but the one God is giving you. Remember, “Not my will but thy will be done.”

Sometimes it means letting go of our human emotions and responses and putting our faith in the unknown, something that feels scary until we remember; we are not alone. God will see us through. And as Bart said, this thing we face will not win.

No matter what you are experiencing, my prayer for you is that you will find the hope that reminds you that you are a beloved child of God and He will love you through the difficult times and will, in fact, carry you.

I would like to close with the old poem that has been an important message in my family over the years.

### **Footprints**

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."

**Prayer:**

Most gracious and loving God. We pray that during our times of trials and tribulations that we would recall your immense love for us and the times you have carried us. Lord, we know we will face more trials and tribulations in our life on earth. Help us to remember and feel your presence and to find hope in you. For we ask this in Jesus name, *Amen*.

*(Source for Bart Millard interviews – You Tube)*