

WELCOME 13th September 2020 – 15 Pentecost '20 A

2 Timothy 4:1-8 & Isaiah 43:1-3a & 18-21

Welcome again this morning! I'm glad you're here AND I pray you experience God's grace in this brief time together. Please check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study catch-ups & other important information about our ministry.

We're continuing with our adapted worship...so as usual there are Group Study/Discussion resources available on our website & in your hands. *If you're on-line I trust you'll make your way through the songs we've linked to this morning. We're also in the Guide Hall so you're experiencing here what we're experiencing there. Our aim is to equip you so your home becomes a place of the Spirit working leading you & those you've gathered in your homes into the fullness of God's word & his work in your lives & then out into the city to share what God has done for you.*

Remember all the great things we need to do to keep each other as safe as we can in this unending season of "the virus." Hand sanitizer. Masks. Sign in. Distance. We'll clean everything afterwards so you don't have to ;-)

As we move into this week...

On your own...Alone. Small words...a range of emotions/experiences. Fear. Dread. Anticipation. Loneliness. Freedom. On. Your. Own. Dependence to independence. Needing to be driven; driving yourself. Living at home; your own place. From a house full to just you. Life is full of 'on your own/alone' moments that can either stop you in your tracks or launch you into new adventures. How do you thrive when you're on your own?

Two promises hold you in every "on your own/alone" moment:

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine."

"Now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing."

From first heartbeat to final breath, you are never alone. The Father's sure hand & unfailing love are never relaxed or released & in Christ endure forever. We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God of grace & glory, come & be known to us in our gathering. Be present in our songs & prayers. From the busy & confusing places of life receive us & revive us. Surround us with your love, fill us with your peace, & move us by your Spirit. In all we do, from this point into this week, give us strength & courage to share our trust in you in real ways in real life to the real people all around us. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord...Amen.

Let's sing & the we'll hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When do you feel most "on your own/alone?"
2. When has God been especially present to you in a recent "alone" time?
3. What is one thing you can offer someone who is in a time of feeling "on your own/alone?"

BIBLES

15 Pentecost '20 A - NEW TERRAIN: THRIVING IN LIFE'S CHANGES – THRIVING WHEN YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN

"I thought I was the only one." It's often that discovery, that someone struggling through a difficult circumstance in their life is **NOT** the only one, not out by themselves, odd, weird strange...alone...that becomes a first step toward healing restoration & joy. How many single parents, struggling students, overworked employees, folks under intense emotional mental physical hardship convince themselves that "no one else" knows, feels, understands...and in feeling on their own or alone, the pain intensifies? But finding a companion, ally, shoulder, fellow struggler, one who knows...the pain begins to be lifted in the sharing. There is something therapeutic – restorative – healing about not being alone.

One of the things these last 6 months of varied stages of lockdown & isolation have forced upon us is that sense of being on our own...alone. Who do you trust to hug 'em, to hang out & shake hand or share plate of food...? Unable to gather with friends or family. Restricted in how/when/where we worship. Obstacles to pursuing healthcare or a haircut. Registering your presence & wellness status just to get coffee/meal. There have been days...it's just easier to be alone. But we don't function at our best on our own. We aren't at our most satisfied most content when it's just us. Every measure of happiness & contentment falls the longer we are isolated/alone/on our own. When we are too long cut off from others...even what we are good at withers...deteriorates. Even the perception that we are on our own can be destructive...For example...

I just finished re-reading the gospel of Mark...Mark's account of the life/ministry of Jesus is one you could read in about 2-3 hours like a good book. But early on there's a moment...we know the story...Mk 4...Jesus has had **one of those** days... Healing teaching, theological swordfight w/ the Jewish religious hierarchy...As the day ends he's got his back to the Sea of Galilee as the crowds in front of him disperse & he says to the disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." As they get a bit out from the shore the boats are literally attacked by a ferocious violent storm. Mt/Mk/Lk all record this event & all of them use words to describe it that make it sound like a cyclone/tsunami/earthquake all rolled into one *seismos megale* The disciples are losing it & Jesus is snoozing it...asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. So they wake him up & shout "Teacher, don't you care that **we're going to drown?**" (*perishing*) The word there at the end of that sentence is literally "being destroyed." Like, "We're dying here. We're literally about to die & you're sleeping!?" When you feel like you're on your own & there's an earthquake or a virus...job...relationship or a

circumstance that won't be easily solved won't go away & you know like no one else that it wants to "destroy" you... That's a problem & you start being driven by fear & your decisions & reactions are those made in fear. The disciples are afraid, they're panicking & it seems like Jesus doesn't care. Ps 10:1 - *O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?* Stop right there...

You know, there are all kinds of people outside the church look at the current world circumstance or who were standing around on 9/11 & legit asked, "Where is God?" But let's be honest, there are times when those of us inside the church wonder, "God, what are You doing? Where are You in this? Don't You care? Won't You break this pandemic? or at least the panic so many feel...We're dying here."

Isaiah is a prophet leading into the most devastating time in the history of Israel. He speaks into the period leading into the destruction of the Nth/Sth Kingdoms of God people. Nth will be lost forever to the Assyrian conquest. The Sth will be crushed by Babylon & live 70 years in exile & return to devastation like they've never seen or imagined. This desolation is unavoidable because for generations God's people lived as if God did not exist, as if they were on their own & not accountable to the covenant of love & devotion God had committed to them. It is clear the Babylonians will destroy & kill & violate & decimate & do so with great enjoyment & wanton abandon...Babylon was a human *seismos megale* about to hit the people of God & the people of God would literally be destroyed. They are about to receive the full weight of living as if they are on their own...And God says:

But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

The stuff is about to hit the wind propulsion device & God's word is "Do not be afraid." The most repeated command in the Bible is "Do not be afraid." About 366X that command is given...1 for every day of the year + 1...Stay in Isaiah for a sec *seismos megale* is about to hit their nation...The worst possible outcome for the lives of these people listening to Isaiah is on the horizon & God wraps His arm around them & says, "I have called you by name; you are mine." I am not going to let destruction destroy you forever. I am not going to let devastation devastate you into oblivion. I am not going to let death have you. I am not going to let chaos overwhelm you. *I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

My plan is to bring you through this to me. My purpose is to restore you to myself. Look at vs 18-21...God says, "your dry places will become lush oases...your desolate places will teem with life...your wounded places will be healed...your worn out/weary places will become places of restoration & refreshment. In whatever happens you are not alone because you are mine & I will not permit anything to take you from me forever." How do you thrive when you're on your own? ...when it feels like there's nobody but you...no one gets it no one understands no one knows...Stop...that's fear talking & you need to let the Father have His word: **"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.** Ain't nothing gonna change that.

Let's get back in the boat for a minute...*"Teacher, don't you care that **we're going to drown?**" (perishing) Don't you care that things are completely out of control & we don't know how to put the genie back in the bottle/back to normal? Don't you care that everything we worked so hard for is going down the gurgler? When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind & said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, & there was a **great calm**. Then he asked them, "Why are you **afraid?** Do you still have no faith?" I have never believed Jesus was speaking only to the wind & waves. I think he spoke to the disciples & the forces of nature force 5 cyclone/9.9 richter scale earthquake all said "Nuts! We just ticked off God!" And settled down. Like yelling at your kid hoping the others get the message. I want you to note there are 2 kinds of fear in play among the disciples. The 1st is the kind of panic that sets in when you are no longer in control of what's going on in your life & you realize you are never really in control...just a façade. Anything could happen at any moment & you can't stop it...That's when you're screaming at Jesus...it's ok...he can take it...just know that that is an irrational anxious panic that God says doesn't have to be part of your life because he's got you...& never lets go.*

But here's the cool thing... *seismos megale* becomes *galena megale* mega-calm & the disciples now are *phobo megale* mega-afraid in the presence of Jesus...*The disciples were **absolutely terrified**. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind & waves obey him!"* This is not the same word as in the other passage...& it makes you wonder, what's going on? Storm's gone. Sea's calm. Why are the disciples *phobo megale* now? The word used earlier **That** was the panicked fear, lack of confidence, thinking things are out of control. **This** word means reverence or awe in the face of the holy...It's the word Isaiah used when he was in the presence of God & the angels are crying out *Holy Holy Holy*. This is the word of Peter when he first meets Jesus & his boat is so full of fish it's starting to sink.

This is the word of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years until she touched the hem of Jesus' robe & was instantly healed. This is the word of Jairus when Jesus walked up to his little girl's dead body & said "Honey get up."

The One who commands wind/waves is in the boat with them...how useless does their panic & anxious shrieking look now & they are in awe of/fear Him. The disciples knew their Scriptures. Who has power to command the wind/waves to be still?

Ps 107:28-29:"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, & he saved them from their distress. He calmed the storm to a whisper & stilled the waves. That sort of fear is the word of the women at the empty tomb. This is the sort of fear Paul has at the end of his life...

As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have remained faithful. Now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

As Paul writes this letter he does not know when he is going to die. He only knows it's sooner rather than later...Romans hated letting their prisoners get old & he'd already been let out of prison once. But no matter...he was not truly alone in his cell. He would not be alone with his executioner. He would not be alone in death. The One who had truly felt God's absence & cried out in that desolation had been raised from the grave & rules now & forever & his hand was upon Paul & his presence was assured. From first heartbeat to final breath, you are never alone. You have been bought & paid for by Jesus Christ...ransomed redeemed by his blood poured out & body broken. The Father's sure hand & unfailing love are never relaxed or released & in Christ endure forever.

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father because of your great love we are never truly alone or forgotten. Make us ready to offer that same assurance to the people around us. Give us boldness and gentleness to speak your promises to a disbelieving world and to trust without fail the power of your Word and the strength of your Spirit alive in us through Jesus Christ... Amen**