

So Much is Out of Our Control
March 13, 2022, Lent 2
Luke 13:31-35
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Two years ago this week, on March 11th, 2020, the WHO announced that the Novel Coronavirus now known as COVID 19 was being declared a global pandemic. Because of this, we have endured two years of massive upheaval in our daily lives, the loss of friends and family to this disease and many more who have contracted the disease, some who continue to live with what has been termed long Covid. Much of this has been beyond our control which also happens to be the focus of this morning's sermon. But before we get to that I want us to take a moment of prayer, to hold as sacred the 966,000+ people in the USA and the over 6 million people in the world, who have died from covid since the beginning of this pandemic. If you have been directly impacted by the death of someone due to covid I invite you to say their first name, so that we may honor your grief and loss.

“Lord, we hold as sacred the memories of all those named here and pray for all who have died. May they live on in you and in our hearts. Be with us and comfort us in our time of grief. We also pray for those who continue to suffer the effects of this disease. Pour out you're healing and give them peace. Amen”

When COVID and the shutdowns started most of our daily routines were upended and put on hold. Especially in the beginning, most of the restrictions were beyond our control and the impact of those restrictions also brought other secondary impacts. Isolation, supply shortages, loss of income, increased other health concerns like anxiety, stress, depression and so forth that also felt out of our control.

Mental health professionals say unresolved issues of stress causes a reduction of productivity in the workplace. Prior to Covid this was estimated at about 35% reduction, but this percentage rose significantly during the first year of the pandemic. That makes

so much sense, and yet many of us struggle with guilt and anxiety for not powering through, instead of adjusting to our current conditions. We feel that we have to keep powering through no matter what gets in the way, or we feel like a failure. We may try to ignore it or at least deny it to others. We seek to pray it away. Some may even tell us that faith, or the power of positive thinking is the key to neutralizing this outside threat. All the while we may find ourselves becoming more anxious, more frustrated and even angry at ourselves or others that we are losing control of the situation and all that makes things even worse.

Why? Because we so badly want to control others and the things that are truly outside of our control to some how get back on track. We demand that things go the way we expect, and we think that by sheer willpower they will. Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way.

In today's readings we see two examples of being frustrated with others. On the one hand we have the psalmist saying:

When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "I shall seek Your face, LORD." Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not abandon me nor forsake me, God of my salvation!

Then in the Gospel we hear Jesus say to the people:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! "

Both are struggling with the frustrations of life. We struggle when the troubles of life feel like God is hiding from us. We wonder "did I fail to seek God enough? Did I anger God did I sin and am now cut off?" For God, our independent and foolhardy ways look like a chick failing understand the sheltering presence of the mother and heed the impending danger.

Jesus was frustrated that even though he was doing so many good things, things that the people needed such as being healed of demonic influence, curing diseases and proclaiming the word of God, he would still be rejected. The religious officials were trying to control Jesus by appealing to his sense of self-preservation. Herod was trying to intimidate Jesus with threats of death. Jesus realized that neither of them saw what he was really seeking to do, and it frustrated him and grieved him.

This is the dance of life, but we seem to have two left feet because we keep trying to lead when God is the instructor. We think we know where we need to go and we get our toes stepped on. We get frustrated when life is out of our control, but we also fail to stop and heed the instructor and learn to feel the subtle cues that our dance partner in life gives us to lead us forward when we cannot see where we are going next.

Jesus sees the attempts of others to step on his feet, But Jesus just clarifies, I am going to go here, and do this and then I will do this because this is where we are supposed to go. Peter didn't understand this, the pharisees didn't understand this and even Herod tried to put Jesus off. They all had different motives for why they wanted to take control. They were all looking at their own feet, rather than looking at Jesus.

The psalmist said it best, "When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "I shall seek Your face, LORD." The psalmist heard "just look at me" as the dance began and even though it confused them at first, they returned to "you are the God of my Salvation." And once again looked up at the instructor, trusting that even though things seemed out of control that God was still leading in the right direction.

Life is full of all kinds of frustrations, injustices, and people and things we can never seem to control. We need to remember whose wings are around us seeing us through the storm. The key is trust. Trust that even though things seem out of control, and we wonder, is God mad, have we been abandoned that we look up again trusting that God is there, even when we cannot see God in the midst of it all.

These last several years we have seen some pretty dark and scary times. Maybe you are facing some difficult things ahead that seem out of your control. Most recently we feel the dread of the war in Ukraine and the impact of this war is having on others. It has displaced millions of people and threatens the life and liberty of millions more beyond the borders of Ukraine. We may feel helpless, but not hopeless.

I take solace in words of a poem written on the wall of a hiding place in Germany near the end of World War II. There are many versions and origin stories attributed to this poem. The most familiar words render the poem this way.

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining; I believe in love even when feeling it not; I believe in God even when he is silent.

But after years of research, Unitarian minister, Rev. Everett Howe wrote a series of articles in his blog Unitarian seminarianⁱ the results. He eventually found the oldest written version in a Zurich News article with an eyewitness account of the writing on the wall. It written by Jewish people hiding in the ancient tunnels under Cologne Germany. Nine Jewish fugitives were hidden there for four months by members of the Catholic Resistance. The poem read:

*“I believe in the sun, though it be dark; I believe in God, though He be silent.
I believe in neighborly love, though it be unable to reveal itself.”*

Rev. Howe at the end of his articles about this earliest rendition writes:

“These specific words change the meaning of the quotation for me. The Jews hiding underground could not see the sun; it was not there for them. And it sounds like God was silent for them at that time, too. But charity, or benevolence, or neighborly love, or compassion... well, those things were present with them at that very moment, because people were risking their lives to keep them safe, and people were sharing rations with them. Nächstenliebe [neighborly love] was right there with them — although it (like them) had to be hidden.”

ⁱ From <<https://humanistseminarian.com/2021/04/04/i-believe-in-the-sun-part-v-the-source/>>