

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

Pastor Alva Looze

I am really enjoyed this series of sermons that Bob has given on the Church of the Future. It has really left me thinking on the changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament to modern times. It has been thought provoking to me and I hope it is to you. This morning our first scripture reading that Bob read was about Joshua. Joshua's remarkable life was filled with excitement, variety, success and honor. He was known for his deep trust in God and as "a man in who is the spirit". He lived through the bitter realities of slavery in Egypt, he witness the plagues, and the Israel's escape when the waters of the Red sea opened before them as they escaped from the Egyptians. He was the only man to accompany Moses up the holy mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. It was Joshua who stood watch at the temporary tent of meeting Moses set up before the tabernacle was erected. Moses was told by God to turn everything over to Joshua. God chose Joshua to bring Moses' work to completion and establish Israel in the Promised Land. Bob read one of the best-known passages in the book, "Decide today whom you will serve...As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord."

That scripture speaks volumes to you and me. In Joshua's time the people were tempted to served the gods of their ancestors but in our days God challenges us to live a life of faith but many other forces compete for our time, our energy and our resources. How can we sort through all that goes on in our lives to face the challenges that we compete with?

You know sometimes I think we need to listen to how our young men and women are trained for the service. Never leave a man or women behind. If you are in command you need to have you're people accounted for. As God's people, his disciples, we are not only accountable for ourselves but are accountable to those around us. We need to care not only for ourselves but those around us.

As we look into our gospel lesson we may have better insight at a new phase of Jesus' ministry when he began to send out the apostles to do the type of preaching, teaching and healing that they had observed him doing. The disciples Simon Peter, James and John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thaddeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot. These twelve disciples were fishermen, tax collectors just plain ordinary men. On the first tour Jesus traveled with the four fishermen; on the second all 12 were with him; on the third Jesus traveled alone after sending out the Twelve two by two. Take nothing. No excess baggage that would encumber travel, not even the usual provisions. They were to be entirely dependent on the people with whom they were staying. They were to use only one home as headquarters while preaching in a community.

In our world how do we interpret how we are to follow Jesus? How do we become a person of real faith? Early in most of our lives our parents bring us to church. We go to church school, probably a youth group, then confirmed and become a member of the church. Sometimes some of us sing in the choir, work on mission, and various projects the church is doing. Hopefully we will continue to grow in our faith. We're off to college and all the activities it entails and sometimes we break away from church and hopefully the solid foundation keeps us strong. "Like the wise man who built his house upon the rocks".

Graduation, work, then marriage, and children seem to bring us back to the church. In "The Once and Future Church", Loren Mead says "Each life-crisis will need to be seen as an opportunity for growing deeper in faith – not just getting through the crisis. Job-change, divorce, marriage, death, remarriage, retirement, going to work after retirement, breaking up from a relationship that was not a marriage, discovery that a friend or a friend's child has AIDS, going to an adult facility, and going into a nursing home – each of these crises is a personal challenge. It is also an opportunity for the community of faith to help a person go deeper into faith and into a new stage of ministry". Sometimes the road will be rough and like Jesus' disciples we fall, have to pick ourselves up, and dust off our feet and go on. We need to be there to help each other along the way. Faith builds and we need to be in community with others so that when we falter there are those who pick up one another.

Life styles have change and most women are in the labor force. It makes a difference on how much time and energy they can give. We need to have meetings short and concise while the youth are at their activities so that our youth will realize the importance of working in the church. Our missions need to involve whole families working together in communities, on a project or in helping a member of the congregation. We have this sandwich generation. Mom and dad's taking of their parents along with baby sitting little ones. Last Sunday I stopped by a dear friend who recently lost her loved one and was staying with her daughter. Not only was she staying but also they had their beautiful granddaughter for the day. It is a balancing act but love and cooperation makes it all work.

Churches In Action is another way families can work together. May 8th and 9th they helped a refugee family from Myanmar move into a house from a refugee camp. This September there were collection boxes for new unopened packages of men's, women's and children's underwear and socks. What a way to teach children mission. To let them know that there are people within our communities that lack clean underwear when they have so much and is probably lying around their rooms.

We are fortunate here at St. James that our staff has been long term and stable. Bob just celebrated his 25th anniversary here last Sunday. From the accolades I know he is a very important part in your lives. I have been here five years and am just uncovering some of the trails he has blazed. Change in religious institutions takes time. Results are not fast and the only way you that you see them is stepping back and looking at the whole picture. Those of us who have been around for a while often run into projects that are being announced as "the first ever", and we remember others who have worked so hard on the same issue perhaps a decade ago. A new enthusiastic person is unaware of that project and it at the right time and the right place is the change we need for the future of the church. We need to encourage and lend our support. Sometimes we just have to experiment with changes, some work and some don't.

Our generations are moving so quickly. How do we as Christians find a community that forms and sustains us in our faith, update it to suite the next generations and pass that on to our next generations?

Hopefully, we here at St. James can share our faith, respond to God's call in the 21st century. What is in our hands is an opportunity to use the gifts given to us and how they will be used cannot be predicted. It is an exciting time in the church and just as Joshua was called and the disciples were called you and me are called and we need to help one another to answer that call.

PRAYER

Help us O God to listen and fulfill our call. Amen