

SERMON BY ELDER DAVE ROCKWELL, SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2020

“COOPERATING WITH GOD”

EXODUS 3: 1-12

JOHN 11: 32-44

GOOD MORNING, AND WELCOME TO FAITH PRESBYTERIAN.

PLEASE PRAY WITH ME: “GRACIOUS AND LOVING GOD, LET MY WORDS BE ONLY YOUR WORDS, LET MY THOUGHTS BE ONLY YOUR THOUGHTS, AND WE KNOW THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OF OUR HEARTS ARE NOTHING WITHOUT YOU, BECAUSE YOU ARE THE ROCK ON WHICH WE STAND AND YOU ARE OUR ONLY SALVATION AND REDEMPTION. AMEN”

LET ME INTRODUCE TODAY’S MESSAGE WITH A VERY SHORT STORY:

THERE WAS A MAN SITTING IN THE SECOND PEW WHO HAS SERVED FAITH AS A RULING ELDER FOR MANY YEARS. HE WAS ASKED, MANY YEARS AGO BY THE FOUNDING PASTOR OF FAITH TO SERVE A SHORT 6 MONTH TERM ON THE PRESBYTERY COMMITTEE FOR PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. WELL, THAT “SHORT TERM CALL” TURNED INTO SERVING ON THAT COMMITTEE FOR SIX YEARS DURING WHICH HE WAS ASKED TO READ ORDINATION EXAMS IN SAN FRANCISCO ON TWO OCCASIONS, AND THEN MODERATING THAT COMMITTEE. HE WAS THEN ASKED TO SERVE ON VARIOUS OTHER COMMITTEES FOR THE PRESBYTERY, (THE ONLY ONE HE DID NOT SERVE ON WAS THE PERMANENT JUDICIARY COMMITTEE). THE ONE ORDINATION EXAMINATION HE VIVIDLY REMEMBERED WHILE MODERATING THE PRESBYTERY WAS FOR A YOUNG PASTOR WHO HAD RECEIVED A CALL TO A SMALL CHURCH IN IDAHO. THEY WERE IN ST. ANDREWS PREBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TUCSON. HE WAS ON THE DIAS WITH THE PASTOR’S WIFE AND TURNED AND WHISPERED TO HER; I REALLY DON’T KNOW WHY I AM HERE; I AM NOT QUALIFIED TO DO THIS.” SHE RESPONDED, **“GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS CALL THE QUALIFIED, BUT HE ALWAYS QUALIFIES THOSE HE HAS CALLED”**. THE NEXT YEAR, 2010 HE WAS ELECTED TO SERVE AS ELDER COMMISSIONER TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN MINNIAPOLIS, THEN ON TO THE PRESBYTERY COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY.

I PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION AS I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL OF US TO UNDERSTAND THE STRUCTURE OF OUR DENOMINATION AND THE CONNECTIVITY WITH THE GREATER CHURCH. PERSONNALLY, I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD BE STANDING HERE TODAY OR ANY DAY AND PROVIDING MY INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES, AS I ALWAYS PICTURED MYSELF AS SOMEONE IN THE PEW. I KEEP REDEDICATING MYSELF TO GOD’S WILL, AND IT IS AMAZING WHAT HE IS DOING IN MY LIFE. I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A “PULPIT SUPPLY” IN BENSON ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, HAVE PROVIDED MY INSIGHT AS OUTGOING PRESBYTERY MODERATOR TO A

SANCTUARY FILLED WITH PASTORS AND ELDERS, AND OFFICIATED AT A MEMORIAL SERVICE WITH MILITARY HONORS; I KEPT THINKING NOT THIS GUY, HOWEVER GOD KEPT SAYING, YEP, I WANT YOU FOR THIS AND MORE, AND I WILL BE WITH YOU AS I HAVE BEEN AND WILL ALWAYS BE.

TODAY, I WOULD NOW LIKE US TO CONCENTRATE ON COOPERATING WITH GOD THROUGH THE GIFTS AND TALENTS THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS PROVIDED EACH OF US. I KNOW ONE OF THE WAYS WE COOPERATE IS THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND A STORY FROM GOD'S WORD IS FOUND IN JOHN 11; A STORY WE ALL HAVE PROBABLY HEARD MANY TIMES; THE RAISING OF LAZARUS. I AM PARAPHRASING FROM THE REV. DR. JOHN ASHENHURST, MY GREAT GRANDFATHER, AND HIS BOOK OF SERMONS. HE WAS A PREBYTERIAN PASTOR IN NEW BRUNSWICK, OHIO IN THE 1920-1930S.

LAZARUS WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF JESUS ALONG WITH HIS SISTERS MARTHA AND MARY. JESUS AND HIS DECIPLES WERE SEVERAL MILES FROM THEM WHEN JESUS RECEIVED WORD OF LAZARUS'S 'SLEEP'. NOW IN THOSE DAYS, TO "SLEEP" MEANT A PERSON DIED. JESUS DID NOT IMMEDIATELY GO TO THEM FOR A VERY IMPORTANT REASON. JESUS WANTED GOD TO BE GLORIFIED IN WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO. WHEN JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS ARRIVED IN BETHANY, THERE WAS A CROWD, AS THERE SHOULD BE TO MOURN LAZARUS, AND JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES WENT TO COMFORT MARTHA AND MARY. THEY WENT TO WHERE LAZARUS WAS BURIED. WHEN WE CONSIDER JESUS TOLD THE CROWD WHO WERE WITH MARTHA AND MARY TO ROLL AWAY THE STONE, THIS WAS SOMETHING WE KNOW JESUS COULD CERTAINLY HAVE DONE, BUT HE TOLD THEM TO DO THIS. THIS WAS TO BE THEIR PART IN WHAT WAS TO BE A MIRACLE! UNBEKNOWNST TO THEM, THIS WAS THEIR "COOPERATION" WITH GOD. JESUS CALLED LAZARUS FORTH, AND LAZARUS WAS COVERED IN THE GRAVE CLOTHES. NOW, JESUS DID NOT REMOVE THOSE CLOTHES. HE INSTRUCTED HIS DISCIPLES TO 'LOOSE HIM AND LET HIM GO'. AGAIN, THIS WAS SOMETHING THEY COULD AND NEEDED TO DO. SURELY, JESUS COULD HAVE DONE THIS, HOWEVER I BELIEVE GOD REQUIRES OUR COOPERATION IN THE BESTOWING OF HIS BLESSINGS.

NOW, CONSIDER THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN BONDAGE IN EGYPT; THEY COULD NOT DELIVER THEMSELVES. GOD WANTED MAN'S COOPERATION AND HUMAN LEADERSHIP. GOD CALLED MOSES; NOT A VERY LIKELY LEADER; HOWEVER, REMEMBER, "**GOD QUALIFIES THOSE HE CALLS**". MOSES ASKED GOD SEVERAL TIMES, YOU "CAN'T MEAN ME, I AM NO LEADER AND I AM NOT A FORCEFUL SPEAKER". HOWEVER, GOD WAS WITH HIM AS GOD IS WITH ALL OF US WHEN HE CALLS US TO DO HIS WORK; WE DO NOT DO GOD'S WORK ALONE AND WITHOUT HIS GUIDENCE AND PROTECTION. GOD WANTS MAN'S COOPERATION IN CARRYING OUT HIS WORKS IN THIS WORLD IN GOD'S OWN WAY AND IN HIS TIMING. ALL GIFTS AND TALENTS ARE EQUALLY AS

IMPORTANT IN GOD'S EYE. WE MUST NOT LOOK AT ANOTHER PERSON'S TALENTS OR GIFTS AS MORE OR LESS IMPORTANT AS OUR OWN, AS THEY ALL COME FROM GOD.

WHEN JESUS CALLED HIS TWELVE, HE CERTAINLY DID NOT CHOOSE THEM FROM THE 'RICH AND FAMOUS'; AS WE KNOW, THEY WERE JUST LIKE YOU AND I, REGULAR PEOPLE IF YOU WILL, BUT GOD WOULD "QUALIFY" THEM TO DO HIS WORK. WHEN JESUS CALLED THEM, THEY IMMEDIATELY DROPPED WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND FOLLOWED HIM; LEFT THEIR VOCATIONS, THEIR FAMILIES, EVERYTHING! I BELIEVE THEY WERE NOT REALLY SURE WHO HE WAS OR WHERE THEY WERE GOING, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT JESUS THAT COMPELLED THEM TO FOLLOW.

THINK ABOUT THE TIME JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE BY THE SEA OF GALILEE; JESUS SAW THEM FISHING AND TOLD THEM TO THROW THEIR NETS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BOAT. THEY DID, CAUGHT SOME 153 FISH, PETER JUMPED IN, SWAM TO SHORE AND HELPED PULL THE NETS IN. JESUS THEN FED THEM BREAKFAST OF BREAD AND FISH, THEN JESUS CALLED PETER ASIDE. JESUS ASKED HIM, "DO YOU LOVE ME?" (THIS WAS ASKED AS AN AGAPE LOVE). PETER ANSWERED "YES, LORD YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU" (HE ANSWERED AS A FILIO LOVE). JESUS ASKED PETER A SECOND AND THIRD TIME THE SAME QUESTION; PETER ANSWERED THE SAME WAY (PROBABLY GETTING A BIT CONFUSED AND MAYBE PERTURBED BY THIS TIME!). EACH TIME PETER ANSWERED, JESUS TOLD HIM TO "FEED HIS SHEEP", AND "TEND HIS FLOCK". NOW WE KNOW PETER DID EXACTLY THAT, JUST LOOK AT PETER'S BOOKS IN THE BIBLE; HE TOOK JESUS'S COMMAND TO HEART AND WENT ABOUT "FEEDING THE SHEEP", EVEN TODAY. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF UNDESERVED LOVE, 'AGAPE' LOVE WHICH COULD ONLY COME FROM JESUS HIMSELF.

IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO, BUT KNOWING WE WILL BE "QUALIFIED", EQUIPPED TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT GOD WANTS. WE KNOW JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL BE WITH US IN ALL THINGS AS OUR GUIDE AND PROTECTOR. IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DO; A COOL DRINK FOR SOMEONE, A HANDSHAKE, A MEAL FOR SOMEONE WHO CAN'T DO FOR THEMSELVES, A VISIT TO A HOSPITAL OR NURSING FACILITY, SERVING AS A DEACON OR ELDER, CLERK OF SESSION, CHURCH TREASURER AS MY WIFE CATHY HAS EXPERIENCED. I BELIEVE ALL ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO OUR LORD. WE HAVE BEEN CALLED, IN SOME WAY TO DO GOD'S WORK IN SOME AREA, AND WE SHOULD ALL REMEMBER THAT **"GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS CALL THE QUALIFIED BUT ALWAYS QUALIFIES THOSE HE CALLS"**. THIS IS COOPERATING WITH GOD! IT GETS BACK TO ME AS WE ARE GOD'S HANDS AND FEET, DOING WHAT HE WANTS TO HAVE DONE TO FURTHER HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH. REMEMBER ONE THING FROM TODAY IF YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING: **"GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS CALL THE QUALIFIED, BUT HE ALWAYS QUALIFIES THOSE HE CALLS"**.

I THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE MY INSIGHTS INTO THIS CONCEPT OF COOPERATION WITH GOD, AND FOR ALL OF YOU WHO ARE THE “HANDS AND FEET” OF GOD. YOU ARE MORE OF A BLESSING THAN YOU KNOW.

AMEN!

LORD, SHOW US YOUR WAY IN ALL THINGS THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO BE YOUR HANDS AND FEET AS WE FURTHER YOUR KINGDOM ON EARTH. LET US BE EVER WATCHFUL FOR THOSE IN NEED, REACHING OUT AND TRUSTING YOU IN THE GIFTS AND TALENTS YOU HAVE BESTOWED UPON US. THIS AND ALL THINGS WE ASK IN YOUR SON’S NAME AND OUR SAVIOR, JESUS THE CHRIST, AMEN.

BENEDICTION

LIFE IS SHORT AND WE DO NOT HAVE MUCH TIME TO GLADDEN THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO TRAVEL WITH US.

SO BE SWIFT TO LOVE, MAKE HASTE TO BE KIND, AND GO IN PEACE TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD. REMEMBER, OUR MISSION FIELD IS BOTH WITHIN THESE WALLS AND JUST OUTSIDE THOSE DOORS. GO IN PEACE. AMEN.