

“Wounds of Faith”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
June 4, 2017

Old Testament lesson: Joel 2:28-32

New Testament lesson: John 20:19-23

Actor Gary Busey grew up in the church, but eventually lost touch with his faith life. After a series of bad choices, he found himself reeling from felony drug charges and a life-threatening illness. Busey says his prayer at that time was, “Dear Lord, I’m filled with fear...” And it was at that moment that he heard an inner voice say, “Replace the word fear with faith.” So he did. And “everything got OK.”

Life can be scary. Fear is crippling. We see this in today’s New Testament reading, where Jesus’ closest disciples are gripped by fear after witnessing his crucifixion. They are hiding behind locked doors “for fear of the Jews,” says John, and the risen Lord comes and stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” Jesus sees their fear and replaces it with peace, that they might become a community of faith, the church.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit that gave birth to the church. The birth of the church happens anytime we stand up to the brutality of this world and the fear it creates and replace that fear with faith, with peace.

Faith leads to an inner sense of peace, which is a lot better than where fear leads. Fear leads to resentment and anger. “Fearing the future and resenting the past affects our present and squeezes the life out of it,” That’s according to addiction counselor Erik Bohlin.

“Fear is about the future, anger is about the present, (and) resentment is about the past. The future we really can’t control. The past we can’t change. The present is where we really live.”¹ And yet, how many of us have resentments about the past, fears about the future, and anger in our daily lives? No one is immune to these feelings. But each of us can get beyond them to set them aside and embrace what the Lord has to offer that inner sense of peace.

Look at what the Lord did for those earliest disciples. They were worried about a future they couldn’t control based on a past they couldn’t change, and they were afraid. Jesus comes to them in their moment of fear and disrupts it. He takes their fear and replaces it with faith – a faith that leads to an abiding sense of peace. Jesus shows the disciples the wounds of his crucifixion – the wounds of a world in fear – and he transforms those wounds of fear into wounds of faith. Wounds of faith are those injuries and illness and struggles in life that threaten to undo us, until we give them over to the Lord, in faith.

¹ Erik Bohlin, M.A. is a professional counselor who supports people in addiction recovery.

Take that fear you have about the future and give it over to the Lord. Take that anger you have about the past and let the Lord deal with it. With the future free of worry and the past free of resentment, all that's left at any given moment is peace. A world in peace – free of worry and resentment – can you imagine it?!?

Jesus did. He not only imagined it – conceived of it – he ensured it. Jesus ensures that our world can and will be a world of peace by giving us the faith to set aside our fear and leave behind our resentments. Do you have such faith? Do we have such faith as to step into this world of peace that God has planned for us?

As Christians, as families of faith we are called to live in peace – a peace beyond understanding, a peace based not on logic or reason or fairness, but rather faith. This is what Jesus gave to the world, and not only the world at large, but more specifically, the world we live in, the world of our families, the world of our friends.

Jesus gave rise to the church within the families that he lived in and among friends that were drawn to him. That's where the church lives today – within the families we live in, among the friends we have. That is the church Jesus breathed life into. We see this where Jesus says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this," John tells us, "he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

That's the birth of the church. That's the future of the church. It rests with us. We have the power to forgive or resent, to have fear or have faith. We have the power to create holy moments at anytime – anytime we find ourselves full of worry and resentment.

At those moments when you are gripped by worry and resentment, set aside your fear and embrace your faith. You can do this by remembering the wounds of faith that Jesus showed to his disciples, and then let go of your worry, set aside your resentment. Or look back on the wounds of faith in your life, or the life of someone you know who has come through the worst possible situation based solely on faith.

This idea of living into faith and not fear is reflected in Eugene Peterson's book *Living the Message: Daily Reflections*. Peterson says, "Any time we look into newspapers, or into our own hearts, and despair, we do well to remember that God's people have faced similar prospects, similar reversals, similar headlines, similar assaults on faith, and have recovered from the doubt, been rescued from the pessimism and foreboding and gone on to live in praise of God."² Living in praise of God – despite the fear of the world – that is the definition of church.

² Eugene Peterson, *Living the Message: Daily Reflections*, ed. Janice Stubbs Patterson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 193.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to face our deepest resentment and our greatest worry – not with anger and fear – but with faith, a faith that gives rise to our forgiveness of others and trust in the Lord. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Living God, your Spirit shined like a flame in your church at its founding; shine in us today.

Kindle in us a burning desire to be your church. Use us for your work. Unite us as a community of faith, that we may be the church today – not only for ourselves – but more importantly, for others.

We pray for those who are struggling with illness and disease, that they would know your strength, your peace, your healing.

We pray for those who are grieving, that they would feel your comfort.

We pray for those struggling with worldly concerns, that they would know and embrace your assurance and provision.

We pray, also, for those of us gathered here, that we would shine forth as a community of faith just as faithful to you as your earliest disciples.

We pray all this in your name, Lord Jesus, praying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**