

Learning to be Jesus' People - Trusting Life over Death

Almost everything around us - all that we can see, that we can hear, that we can touch, Almost - everything around us tells us - It isn't so! Dead people are not raised to new life. Maybe almost dead people - Maybe. By some quirk of energy transfer, Some intense belief, so strong in some people, It gives them powers to do what we do not believe we can do, or, that can be done at all.

But Maybe almost dead people can be, have been, revived. That's all. Or - maybe not. Maybe that's not all it is - at all. Maybe there is a force of life so strong, it can hold back death, over come death, So strong that in the end - it is the only force in life that matters.

And maybe, maybe it takes a helpless person... NO.... let me say that differently... Maybe it takes a person who knows that against all the power of nature, he or she, is finally - helpless. Maybe it takes such a person - a helpless widow, Maybe, To be most filled with trust, with faith in God, to be more connected to life than to death. Maybe it takes an Elijah, a person focused fully on God, a Jesus like person, to trust life more than death.

Can we learn to be such kind of people? Life affirming people? Surely Jesus was life affirming. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.... I am come that you might have life and have it abundantly..... Whoever lives and believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live....*

Two widows - with only sons - Two Godly men - Elijah and Jesus. With life force compassion – and they set two markers for us - for affirming life. The Psalmist sang their faith.

Praise the Lord O My Soul. Happy are those whose Hope is in the Lord their God.

But how can we be life affirming people, Jesus people, in the face of all the life denying death dealing forces so much around us? How do we put our hope, not in life - breath by breath, day by day, life. But in the Lord of life. Do we trust most this life, and this world, and all the things that keep us alive in it - from food to the miracles of medicine – do we trust these most - or do we trust – as Jesus did - the Lord of life, even more?

Please pray with me. Lord of life, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen.

Two weeks away - for study and for life affirming experiences with our family. A little golf - yes. But special family time - all the kids and grandkids - in North Carolina. And then most of the family together at my 45th Reunion at the College of Wooster in Ohio.

Little news read or heard, or T.V. watched. Thank goodness. And yet - in the time of study at our Church's retreat center in Montreat, North Carolina, and in special family times, too, the truly life affirming theme of this morning's scripture readings kept niggling away at my thinking. Life...and death.

Death - The carnage continues in Iraq. And Genocide is still a fact in Dafur. And I am soon, with your permission and prayer support, off to South Africa with my daughter on a Medical Mission trip that will bring care and compassion but will hardly touch the AIDS crisis there. And while I was away a long time member died, and a life saving medical team known to some as friends and colleagues, crashed in Lake Michigan....

And don't you wonder with me, trying to sort it all out - the persistent presence of death in life. Is life about life or finally, finally is it, in the end all about death? Or - if - if - Jesus is about life, how can I learn, how can you learn, in the face of such deadly influences, war, and abuse, and disease and disasters...

How can we learn to be Jesus' people - death defying life affirming persons? Can I shut my eyes to all the marks and measures of death I all too often and too easily see around me? Can I? Can I learn, can we learn, to see with other eyes - Elijah and Jesus like eyes of faith? Can I learn to sing the Psalmist's song. ?

Three times in these past 2 weeks I had my eyes refocused, my mind renewed, and spirit lifted - three learning experiences that lightened my load and freshened my faith. And - one more - I find right here this week.

Two weeks ago I watched as our only grand daughter was baptized. And I was proud because she was so good for that preacher - no crying or fussing - just beaming, as if she new what that little bit of water on her head really meant - for her, and for us, for us all. Grace and mercy, forgiveness and new life in Christ from almighty God - the lord of life. Little miss Keely Robertson - not just her Mom and Dad's and grandparent's little girl - but God's person - sealed in the covenant of grace - God's forever child - a Jesus person. A child of eternal life.

And last Sunday I watched as our son Andy and his wife and son were commissioned - just as we commissioned our young people today - They were commissioned for a medical relief missionary assignment this summer in Togo Africa. And Andy knows he will bring to Africa no final life saving medical miracles - but rather he will bring care and compassion and love - easing pain - yes - but sharing in word and deed the greater promise by far, not of extended earthly life, but of life in Christ that is larger and longer than death can ever dictate.

And yesterday - yesterday I stood in al old old grove of Oak Trees on the campus of the College of Wooster - one of our Presbyterian colleges. And I saw at places in the grove I had never seen when I was a student there - what looked like grave stones. But on each grave like stone were chiseled the probable date of one of the trees in the grove. 1631, 1710, 1840 etc. And also on the stones a simple thought. For college students and others to ponder.

From seed these trees you see grew. What seeds of faith have been sown in your life, and will they find root and grow as these trees have grown? And what seeds of faith will you sow - that they will grow in the lives of others?

Life - life around us - life in this world - is itself a reminder to us - of life that is larger still - life stronger than death.

It is a precious seed we've had sown in our lives - the faith we've been given - given to us by others - parents - yes - and teachers, and preachers, and faithful believers who touched our lives with the life giving, life saving spirit that touched their lives.

But the seeds of faith - Jesus like faith in God - will not grow in us if they are not Attended to ... nourished and nurtured by time and attention.

It was the very heart and soul of this Church's beginning - of Carolyn Campbell's conviction that worship and study should not be missed by those who spent their summers at Orchard Lake - And so worship and Sunday School began on Apple Island - and then moved here to the Chapel built to share the faith.

It is the heart and soul of what we launched out to do in our time - just a year ago Today - when we talked - and much more than talked - about Sharing to Build - and began the campaign that has now raised in gifts and pledges about 1.9 million dollars Toward our goal of building an improved facility in order to be able to share our faith in the life giving power of God in this community and beyond for years and years to come. It will take more than we have yet raised to build what we want to build - to share what we want to share -

In a time of challenge - not unlike that Carolyn Campbell faced in 1871 - we may need to do our own kind of grape growing - extra effort - to complete our plans - But we are about a vital faith sharing life affirming mission....

And `It is what this is all about - all we do as Christ's people here - to learn - day by day - how to love Christ more dearly, follow Christ more nearly, And serve Christ more clearly.

And it is very much a part of this week and our hosting South Oakland Shelter - a ministry of care and compassion - affirming the life and new life giving power of God in Christ.

And this faith of ours - this seed of faith we are challenged to nurture and nourish, to grow through times of worship and study - the studies offered now in new and inviting and faith renewing experiences of the Adult Academy - and through service - SOS - and Fort Street this week - and Mission giving and Mission trips -

This faith of ours can equip us, prepare us, guide us and strengthen us as we face the very real, often life threatening challenges of this world.

This week at Wooster I learned that my college room mate's son is now an Apache Helicopter Pilot serving in Iraq. A prayer concern I will be adding to my daily list.

And his mother shared a thought that I should have thought myself - before she said it. I thought first of risk and danger and possible loss. And she carries those feelings very much in her mind and heart.

But she said, in simple words that reflect I know a great deal of deep faith struggle and faith learning and God trusting.... She said - I knew - as I heard of a friend's son's death in a car accident, I knew, I know, that my son is already safe in God's care - safer in God's care than I can or ever could make him in my care.

And come what may I will trust God's way - God's way - who spared not his own son but gave him up for us all - to have life that is more than life -

And that's what I am still trying to learn - and aren't you, too. Isn't that what we have been called by the spirit of God at work in our lives to do - to become more and more Jesus people - to learn to trust the truth that Jesus taught - that in life and death we belong to God

Thanks be to God for Jesus, and for his call to us to be his followers, to learn from him to be his people and so people of eternal hope.... If so be that we suffer with him - that we will also be glorified with him ...

Yes - praise the Lord, for happy, blessed, strengthened, and at peace, are those whose hope is in the Lord their God. They are Jesus people and they trust life more than death. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor