

The Feet of Faith

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
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A few years ago a good friend of mine from Sierra Leone asked our faith community to keep her family and the people of her country in our prayers. There had been civil unrest and the last time she had spoken to her parents they were preparing to go hide in the wilderness. They feared for their very lives and were doing the only thing they could with the hope of staying alive during the unrest. They went into hiding and were living off the land. After some weeks my friend reported to the congregation that she had heard from her family and they were doing well. We rejoiced with her that Sunday. Have you ever been scared for your life? Have you ever found yourself wondering if you would see the next sun rise or look upon the faces of your loved ones? Maybe you were in an automobile accident; or you were the victim of a violent crime; or facing a life-threatening illness. Perhaps you were like my friend living in a county or a region experiencing civil unrest; or, like those living in Haiti, New Zealand or Japan trying to survive an earthquake and trying to pick up the pieces of a shattered life. This past week many in this country felt the terror and fear of approaching death as tornadoes ripped through the south.

Seen in another light, maybe you are one who has lost all hope. You have lost your job with no employment on the horizon; your dream career

has been shattered because you just do not have what it takes; the love of your life has given up on you; or, you find yourself all alone with no friends. It feels as though your whole life has collapsed and all you have is the feeling of a big, empty, dark hole where your life used to be.

These were the fears of the followers of Jesus following the crucifixion.

Even as word spread among the disciples that some of them had witnessed Jesus raised from the dead they remained in hiding – wondering where to go, what to do, fearful that those who had murdered Jesus would soon come after them. So they hid in a room, as the writer of the Gospel of John puts it, with the doors shut and the windows closed.

Have you ever tried to hide from danger – under the bed, in the closet, up a tree, in the woods? Have you then experienced the fear that accompanies such times? Your heart races, the breathing is faster and shallower, your eyes are wide open and your head turns from side to side, your hearing is sharpened all in an effort to sense any approaching danger. Your muscles are tensed ready to spring into motion the moment your hiding place is discovered or becomes threatened.

The followers of Jesus were desperate. They thought that if they stepped out of the house and were discovered that they would be put to death. They had also lost all hope because the one they were following was nowhere to be found. They also must have wondered what had happened to Thomas. Had he been sent on a mission to

get some food and water for the group? Had he gone out with the hope of finding a safe way out of the city? Maybe he had been captured and was being tortured while the disciples remained in hiding.

Into the middle of this room filled with despair, fear and hopelessness, Jesus suddenly appears and brings peace to all who will receive it. His very presence transforms the disciples offering hope and purpose. Jesus tells them that they must be out in the world and not in hiding; that their mission is to be with people and through the power of the Holy Spirit of God to forgive and retain the sins of others. As quickly as Jesus appeared in the room he was gone.

The story continues and a week later we still find the disciples hold up in that dark room. Again Jesus suddenly appears in their midst and one thing has changed, Thomas is now in the room. He sees and touches the wounds on Jesus' body and like the disciples the week before he believes. Jesus again points to the mission that awaits all of his followers when he says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Simply put, Jesus is telling his disciples to get on their feet and get out of the room into the light of day; to spread the word of hope, and life, and peace.

Those who live in fear, hidden from life's dangers, are held captive. If they move at all it is to deepen their hiding in an effort to be more secure. The fear, however, remains and usually deepens as time goes on. Jesus does not transform the dangers of the world and of life. Rather, he transforms those who live in fear and darkness. Jesus

calls us, as he calls his disciples to put feet on our faith to the end that others who continue to live in fear and darkness will be set free the live life to its fullest.