



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

February 1, 2009
4th Sunday after Epiphany
Hebrews 3:1-6
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1
Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Hold On To Your Courage

Christ the faithful Son
Christ the faithful builder

It's an interesting phrase the Holy Spirit uses there at the end of what I just read to you, isn't it? "Hold on to our courage." You and I can be pretty courageous when there are things that aren't threatening us, right? We can talk really smart and act really strong when we aren't being threatened and we aren't being tossed and turned around by things in life. But you and I face a lot of things in this world, because this world has fallen into sin, which test our courage. Some of them are kind of little, like going to the dentist. It might test your courage a little bit wondering exactly how far they are going to drill and if they are going to remember the Novocain completely or not. There's other things in life that test our courage in a way that makes our knees shake and our stomach produce more acid than really is humanly necessary.

As we face things in this world that usually bring about uncertainty of what the future is going to hold, our courage is tested. When we face things that seem to be attacking or opposing us and are stronger than ourselves when we are only looking to ourselves, our courage is threatened. When we look into the future and we see that people that we love are not with us anymore as we face it, how we are going to handle the uncertainty of it tests our courage. When we face the uncertainty of financial things that are in the news constantly these days, uncertainty about what the future is going to bring with job and with loans and all these other things, that uncertainty can test our courage.

This morning our God reminds us that when our courage is being test, when that uncertainty comes that makes us wonder how we are going to handle it, he tells us to hold onto your courage; and your courage is not you. It's not something inside you. It's not you yourself. Your courage comes from outside of you is what he reminds us this morning. Our courage comes from our God. He shows us how Jesus is superior to some of the other things that the people in the day that this was written might have wanted to hold onto for their courage. We are reminded today that God has built us into a spiritual house so that we can encourage one another and give each other the courage of pointing each other back to the Gospel. We'll see how the Lord has done that.

The words I read to you come from the letter to the Hebrews. We don't know really who wrote it, but we do know who they wrote it to—Hebrews—that's why they call it

“Hebrews,” the Jews. You have to understand that a little bit otherwise some of these words that I just read to you aren’t going to make as much sense because the idea for you and me of putting Moses and Jesus about on the same level, that just makes no sense to us. We are used to thinking that Jesus is superior because we believe he is the Son of God who lived and died in our place and took away our sins. But to the Jews he was writing to, the Hebrews, one of the purposes in this letter was to show them that Jesus is superior to Moses.

For those guys, Moses was the greatest prophet that had walked the face of the earth. And it’s true; he was, until Jesus came. They looked to Moses as the Law giver, and quite often, their confidence was in how well they thought they were following the teachings of Moses, the Law that God had given through Moses. By the time Jesus was there, they had drifted away from the promises of that great prophet to come that was in our First Lesson. They had forgotten some of the promises of Isaiah about one who would live and die and take away sin, and they were looking for their confidence and their courage on the basis of their ability to keep the Law.

I don’t know about you, but if I have to put my head on my pillow every night and base my confidence on how well I obeyed everything the Lord said to do that day; those sheets are going to be filled with sweat by morning, aren’t they? I have no confidence. I am a filthy rotten sinner. I don’t love God more than I love myself all the time. I don’t love my neighbor as myself. I don’t do the things God demands of me. And if I look at all those Laws, where he says “don’t kill;” I’ve never killed anyone. But then he says to me “don’t hate someone or else that’s murder in your heart; you’re guilty of the sin of murder.” I have no legs to stand on. Neither do you.

So the comfort and the confidence and the courage that God has for us to hang on to is not ourselves, but you and I are going to want to do that quite a bit. We are going to want to rely on our ability to face the challenges of life. We are going to think that we have to be rugged individualists and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and face all of these difficulties. On a number of different levels today our God tells us when we think that way, we are idiots, because he has something better for us.

Moses was a faithful servant is what our reading said, but the one who is our courage is more than just a faithful servant. Moses was faithful, but Jesus is a faithful Son. He is the one who is the Maker of all things as it says. He is beyond Moses. Moses served him. He is the one who is being served and the one who is the faithful Son, the one who belonged there in the house. He is the one who left heaven and came to earth for you and for me. He came to earth to live perfectly because we don’t keep those Laws. He kept them perfectly and he died with all of our sins on his shoulders and because of that, this faithful Son has taken away our sins. He sent the Spirit into our hearts to lead us to believe that Jesus is the faithful Son, the one who is our courage and our confidence.

So as we face the uncertainties of life, focus on what is certain. What is absolutely positively certain and can never be shaken or taken away from us. What is absolutely

certain is that your God has loved you with an everlasting love that in spite of who you are and what you may have done in the past, what you may be doing right now, and what you may do in the future, he lived and died in your place. He left heaven and became one of us to take away our sins. He is the faithful Son.

But not only is he a faithful Son, he is also a faithful builder. Through his life and death he built something even greater than this world that we live in. He is the Creator of all things most certainly. Nothing exists except that God has brought it into being. Some of what he brought into being rebelled against him and because of that we have sin in the world. But even in the sinful fallen world, Jesus the faithful Son came to this earth and through his life and death built a house that is stronger than the sin of this world. He built a house that is more eternal than the things of this world. The house that he built is us, the body of Christ. The house that he built is taking away our sins so that now through faith we are no longer separated from him. We are united to him and that gives us the courage to face the things of this world.

Think about it. He's built us into a house, an interconnected group of people. We all are like living stones that are built together into the house of God is what Scripture says. Think about how foolish it would be then to try to go through life as an individual, to say "My faith is just between me and God" and to deny this truth that God puts us together with other believers so that we can encourage, support, and lift one another up when we are down. We can point one another back to God's love for us in Christ when things in this world shake and rattle the foundation of our life. God has brought us together to be the people of God, to love one another, to support one another, to encourage one another. We have a sense of belonging that is more than just a social club. That's not what a church is all about. It's about God has made us his own people, holy and perfect and dearly loved through his life and death. Now he puts us together because he knows we are still sinners and we are going to screw up and we are going to do dumb things. We are going to say dumb things. We are going to face the things of this world that challenge us. We aren't always going to make the right decisions. So he puts us with one another so we lead each other back to Jesus, so that we forgive one another when we have sinned against one another, so that we lead each other to turn away from those sins and turn back to Jesus, so that we encourage one another to grow in our faith, to live our faith, to share our faith, to live as those who have been changed by God. He is our courage. He is our hope. And that changes us. It gives us a reason for living; courage for living that is going to be beyond the things that knock us down. Make no mistake, we'll get knocked down by the uncertainties of this lifetime, but we get through them as we focus on the certainties of this lifetime.

Our God is with us in his love. Our God has a prepared heavenly home for us. That's not just pie in the sky for something in the future. That means right now he is with us in his love. And right now he has put all of us together here so that we help each other hold on to the courage which is Jesus Christ.

Don't view each other as a burden, as a pain in your backside, or as something that's annoying, even though we are going to be all of those things at times to each other,

because we are sinners. View each other as a blessing that God has put here so that they can encourage you and you can encourage them. Then we will hold on to our courage and become the house of God that God wants us to be, that God enables us to be, that God equips us to be, and that his Gospel empowers us to be. We are forgiven.