

March 9, 2008 (Lent 5)

Text: Psalm 130

Title: "A Fork in the Road"

true love

In the movie "*The Princess Bride*" there is a scene where the Spaniard and the giant bring the body of Wesley to Miracle Max, desperately hoping for a miracle. Wesley has just been killed by Prince Humperdinck. And they are hoping Miracle Max will somehow be able to bring Wesley back to life.

At one point during this scene, Miracle Max makes a distinction between being "mostly dead" and "all the way dead." And then he leans over Wesley and shouts, so that Wesley can hear him deep down inside where there is apparently still life flickering, however dimly. He asks something like, "What's so important? What is worth living for?"

And from the depths of his being Wesley answers, "True love."

Now, the story "*The Princess Bride*" is a fairytale. And the true love Wesley is referring to is the love he and a fair maiden, named Buttercup, share with one another.

First, rest assured, I am not going to try and compare Miracle Max to Jesus, or anything like that. The connection is that I agree, "true love" is worth living for. More than that, true love is our source of living.

And the "true love" I want to set before you today is the love of God. It is the love we hear described in Psalm 130. It is a love that is attentive, and listens, and where mercy and forgiveness are found. God's love is steadfast, it does not end. It is a love that endures all. It is all powerful love that redeems you from whatever depth you find yourself in.

Because God's love is steadfast and all powerful, is forgiving and merciful, it is a love worth waiting for and hoping in. And because of God's love, he is someone worth turning to, and crying to from the depths.

daily you must choose

Psalm 130 is a cry for help. It is also a declaration of trust. Both are directed toward God, are within the person's relationship with God. Both crying out to God and trusting God for the response are within the context of God's love.

Now, think of yourself as this person praying these words. Before you even open your mouth, before you offer this prayer to God, you have already had to make a choice by faith, and in faith. You can turn to God with your cry for help, or you can look for help

elsewhere. That is what faith and trust are all about. Where do you place your faith? Whom do you trust? Your answer to these questions is shown by where you turn.

A few months ago we were driving on the Olympic peninsula. We had been visiting friends who lived in Belfair, which is near Bremerton. On the drive home we were taking a short cut that ran along the bay and would connect us with the highway, and would save us loads of time.

It was night, we didn't have a map, but we had been this way once before and assumed we would recognize where to go.

However, when we came to a fork in the road, we weren't sure which way to go. But knowing we were trying to go south, we took the right fork of the road.

As you probably have figured out already, by going right we had taken a wrong turn. It was too soon to head south. What we didn't know was that we were on a narrow spit of land that jutted into Puget Sound, with no way to get off other than going back the way we had come.

As we drove we had our suspicions that we were lost. But we pressed on hoping for a way across. Unfortunately, after about ½ hour we got to the end of the road, with the only option being to turn around and head back.

Aren't we daily presented with a similar fork in the road, where we have to make a choice to go right or left ... whether to trust God, or try and strike out on our own?

We are faced with the choice of trusting God, of entering into that kind of relationship with God, or turning somewhere else in search of help. And I think we are faced with this choice each day. Each new day presents you with the option of trusting God or turning to some other god – whether that is yourself, or something else.

The daily choosing describes our faith and our relationship with God. We choose from the depths, or we choose at times when things are great, or we choose in the midst of just the everyday stuff of life. Each day we are presented with the choice to live in trust and faith of the love of God, or to strike out on our own.

Abraham & Lot as they traveled together were presented with a fork in the road. Their flocks and possessions had grown too great for them to live together. Abraham gave Lot first choice on which way to turn, and Abraham would take the other. Lot chose the land that looked, on the surface, to be the best: a lush green land, which looked pleasant and inviting. What he couldn't see was that underneath the land was filled with sin and evil.

Abraham was left with desert and wilderness. But in the end, trusting God to provide, he had made the better choice.

We too are given the option of choosing. When presented with a fork in the road which way do you choose to go?

Joshua as he addressed the people of Israel upon their entering into the promised land, said in effect, “You are at a fork in the road.” Which way will you choose?

“But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”

seeing & believing

When presented with the same fork in the road, which way do you choose to go? You need to decide which path to take. In making your choice Paul warns you,

“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Lot’s choice was based on the flesh. The land looked good to him. He thought it would be a great place to live and work. But the way he chose ultimately led to death. Abraham, on the other hand, had his mind on the Spirit, and so his choice led to life and peace.

It boils down to two things: first, seeing, and second, believing. When you reach a fork in the road how are you going to decide which path to take? You choose the path that will lead you to what you want or need, and you choose the way you believe will get you there.

Driving on the Olympic peninsula we thought we saw our way home. Very soon our belief in the path we had chosen was shaken, and as it turned out, for good reason.

Lot made his choice because he thought he saw a better, more comfortable life before him. He saw possibilities in a land that looked like it was flowing with milk and honey. Unfortunately he couldn’t see it was really flowing with sin and evil.

Abraham trusted God. He saw value in his relationship with God. And he believed God, believed the promises made to him by God.

Psalm 130 expresses hope and trust in God’s love. It sees how important it is to be loved by God. And it believes God’s love can, and will do what it promises.

Psalm 130 expresses the willingness to wait in hope for God to act. Can you picture yourself praying these words of trust and hope in God’s love for you?

In the Gospel, Jesus tells Martha, the sister of the dead man, Lazarus,

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live ...”

And then he asks her, “Do you believe this?”

In other words, do you trust me? Am I your hope?

She said to him,

“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

At another point, Jesus also tells his disciples, “Because I live, you also will live”

You can rely in trust and hope on his promise. What you find there is life. The promise of life is made by someone who is trustworthy and true. And so you don't need to live today as someone with no hope. Instead you are a person with hope, just like the prayer in Psalm 130.

living in the kingdom

Now, I have a question for you. What does this living in hope look like? What does it look like to wait for God, and to hold tight to God's word in hope, like the psalm says? Can you get a picture of what that looks like in your life?

In order for this to be a reality in your life, you must be able to visualize this, to see yourself believing and trusting, waiting and hoping.

As people of God, the invitation is for us to “wake things up” in our life, to a vision of what is possible living in God's kingdom.

What is your vision for the possibilities of living in trust and hope, of believing in a God who loves you, who has the power to redeem you?

What we are about as this community of believers, living in God's kingdom, is being able to imagine the possibilities and the reality of living in the hope given to you by the knowledge that your God is merciful and forgiving and steadfast in love for you.

What does this look like for you? How are you daily being shaped by the knowledge that your life is a gift from God, and that the hope in you is the result of God's grace given to you. And that in your hope you can embrace this gift and live it. Can you see what this looks like?

Living this way also means being aware that as the church we are formed by the cross of Christ. That is we are redeemed.

Imagine what that would look like. That is our task as a community of believers to help one another, and together to explore what this looks like, how it takes shape, within these walls, and as we live daily – at home, at work, at play.

This seeing is not just about the practical application of a list of does and don'ts. Instead, it's about living in God's kingdom, a kingdom already coming into being. It's about seeing that kingdom, seeing the possibilities, and the opportunities, seeing the vision of how God wants you to live, and in obedience, stepping out in faith and in trust.

To see and experience this vision as a reality in your life, Andrew Murray says to take time each day to place yourself with God, and seek to be influenced by Him; giving Him, "the opportunity of taking hold of you, of drawing you up and keeping you safe in His almighty life."

When you pray Psalm 130, this is what you are asking: "In your love God, take hold of me, draw me to you, and keep me safe. I wait for you. You are my hope."

This is the "true love" I want to set before you today – the love of God. It is love that is attentive to your voice; that listens to your cry. It is love that is merciful and forgives. It is love that is steadfast and never ending.

God's love is worth waiting for and hoping in. God is, therefore, someone worth turning to, and crying to from the depths, or the heights, or wherever you find yourself.

God's love is your way to life. It is the way to live.
Amen.