

Comfort in the Valley 07.03.11

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 MSG (read by Jessica)

Video: "You Are With Me" by Flickering Mind Media [2:43]

Intro: Normally we'd be talking about Independence Day, our freedom in Christ. I had prepared a sermon along those lines. Maybe we'll get to it next week... or next 4th of July. This morning as I awoke I was mourning the loss of Frank Rutkowski. And I felt strongly that we needed to change the direction of our worship service this evening.

Meditations During Our Loss

Losing Frank is a blow to all of us - not the least Theresa. All of you were his friends. We watched Frank give his life to the Lord, we watched his video testimony, and we watched him and Theresa be baptized here almost six months ago on January 16th. The vocabulary of our church, I think, has been changed forever by Frank's often given request that we all "pray with umph!" So it's natural that we are mourning, grieving. It's hard to party this 4th of July when our hearts are so heavy.

But I have GOOD NEWS for you this evening...

God promises comfort - **HIS VERY PRESENCE** - in the valley!

We are going through the valley of the shadow of death right now. Frank has been there, done that. He's past it all! But we are still in death's shadow. God promises to be with us too!

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."
Psalm 23:4 ESV*

It's worthwhile for us to note the fact that none of us ever ARRIVE at death. It is not a destination for us. We always walk through it. Frank has walked through it. We also are walking through the shadow now. We have no need to fear - for ourselves or for Frank. God promises to be with us. And his Presence gives us all the comfort we need
BECAUSE...

God Himself is **THE COMFORTER**.

The Greek word for comfort (and encouragement) is παρακαλέω. It means to call to one's side, to invite, to call out to, to summon aid; to speak earnestly, to implore, to beg... and to comfort.

The Greek word/name for the Holy Spirit is παράκλητος (John 14:16; 16:7)

"And I will pray to the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." John 14:16 KJV

Many different words used in English: Comforter, Advocate, Helper. But this is God in His Spirit, coming alongside in our time of grief and trouble and mourning. **The early church experienced comfort:**

"Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [the church] multiplied." Acts 9:31 ESV

How Does God Comfort Us?

It is all well and good to state the facts that God comforts us... but it would be helpful if we understood HOW he does this. Especially when we are grieving the loss of someone dear and close to us. Tonight I'd like to mention 5 ways the God of Comfort comforts us...

God comforts us through...

GRACE

The old acrostic we learned was God's Riches At Christ's Expense. We do not need to worry about whether or not Frank... or any of us... are good enough to be with God upon our death. Let me clear away the doubts. We are NOT! It's only because of Christ and because of his work, death, and resurrection that we have have hope. It is a good hope, a solid hope, based on God's very promise!

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.”
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ESV

Several things to note about this GRACE promise:

- It is God who loved us, gave us comfort & hope. He is all powerful and is able to do what He says. It is not up to us or our feeble minds or faith to bring about this promise. God does it despite our doubts or our failures.
- It is past tense: God GAVE us eternal comfort. That eternal comfort is yours for all eternity. Not something that occurs in the future. Already done... accomplished!
- That eternal comfort - enjoyed forevermore, given in the past... COMFORTS US IN THE PRESENT!
- Finally - it is God who establishes us in every good work... not our work that establishes us with God. Glory be to God for that order of things!

JESUS' WORDS

We study the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John so we can constantly have Jesus' words fresh in our mind. No one else ever taught like him - like one who had authority. He was God's Son in the flesh and he could tell us things no other human could. **For example...**

“But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish.’” Luke 16:25 NLT

When Jesus told his parable of Lazarus and the rich man, we often focus upon the anguish of the rich man. Perhaps our emphasis is wrong... rather it should be upon the *comfort of Lazarus!* In particular for our purposes this evening, we should also emphasize the word “NOW.” Now - this very moment - Lazarus is being comforted. We should take comfort also in this: NOW - this very moment - Frank is being comforted if his testimony was true. No man can know the heart of another. But I was with Frank and I've never heard a more heartfelt confession. One more example - the thief crucified next to Jesus just asked to be remembered. What did Jesus say?

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”
Luke 23:43 ESV

PREACHING

We should also be comforted by the faithful preaching of God's Holy Word. This is why I felt so compelled to respond to the Spirit's moving and change my talk for this evening. You needed to be comforted.

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” 2 Timothy 4:2 NIV

This is that same word again, παρακαλέω and it has multiple ideas:
encourage = comfort = urge = exhort

God in his wisdom uses the foolishness of preachers' words to remind us of His comfort. If the preacher is faithful to God's words, regardless of the delivery or the showmanship or the rhetoric, you should find the Holy Spirit comforting you through the preacher's words. **Speaking of HS...**

HOLY SPIRIT

I know it sounds like I'm repeating myself here. I am. God is the God of Comfort and he comforts us. We especially need to hear this when we are going through difficult times, when our doubts are the highest, when our faith is the lowest. In fact these very hard times are when GOD MOVES ALONGSIDE US!

“All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times...” 2 Corinthians 2:3-4a MSG

It is true, of course, that God is with us at all times. Yet miraculously it seems as if He makes Himself even louder, even more noticeable. The coincidences of his love and affection for us grow beyond the credible when we go through hard times. **Often He does this through...**

ONE ANOTHER

God actually uses fallible, broken, imperfect people to communicate his infallible, unbroken, perfect love, peace, hope AND COMFORT:

“... and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.” 2 Corinthians 2:4b MSG

Do you notice the end... “just as God was there for us.” In other words God uses your own brokenness, your own sadness, your own experiences of loneliness to bring community to the alone, your own experiences of brokenness to bring healing to the broken, your own experiences of grief to bring comfort to the grieving! In those holy moments you allow the Holy God to minister to someone else. You are the physical body coming alongside someone else, bringing the very Spirit of Christ. **This is why Paul begins and ends 2 Cor. with...**

“Comfort one another.” 2 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

Be that comfort to one another now.

Illustration: The way Rachel was with Theresa all day yesterday. That was God working through Rachel. The way Jack and Sherri have provided shelter to Theresa - that's God working through Jack and Sherri. The way many of you prayed this week. That's God!

Conclusion: Remember Frank - not just for his gruff wit or for the way he boldly faced this cancerous end to his health. Don't remember just his failings, for surely he had them. Don't remember him just for his service to country - though we celebrate freedom this weekend because of men like Frank. Don't just remember Frank just for his devotion for church - though I will never forget the encouragement that he has brought to me. Don't just remember Frank just for his love for Theresa, though I'm sure she will never forget his affections.

Remember Frank for this: despite his doubts he professed Christ as His Savior and His Lord. Remember his baptism and the faith of Christ in and through Frank as Frank took that step of obedience. Remember Frank for his urgent request for us to pray with umph - and the faith and trust in Christ that was evidenced in such a request! Remember Frank as someone who remembered Christ.

And then know this. If Frank was genuine in his remembrance of Christ... Christ will remember Frank.

And when you remember that... remember this: Christ will also remember you. Let's pray.

Prayer and Benediction.