

A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING

MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT

JUNE 19, 2016

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

FATHER'S DAY

FROM TODAY'S COLLECT:

O GOD, THE PROTECTOR OF ALL THAT TRUST IN THEE,
WITHOUT WHOM NOTHING IS STRONG, NOTHING IS HOLY;
INCREASE AND MULTIPLY UPON US THY MERCY; THAT, THOU BEING
OUR RULER AND GUIDE, WE MAY SO PASS THROUGH THINGS
TEMPORAL, THAT WE FINALLY LOSE NOT THE THINGS ETERNAL.
GRANT THIS, O HEAVENLY FATHER, FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS CHRIST
OUR LORD. *AMEN.*

A CONVERSATION OVERHEARD BETWEEN TWO INDIVIDUALS: "ONE
LONELY DAY I PHONED MY AL-ANON SPONSOR CRYING OUT IN DESPAIR
THAT I'D NEVER GET THE HANG OF FEELING BETTER. WHAT SHE SAID AT
THAT CRITICAL TIME WAS, "I DON'T KNOW ANYONE WHO WAS WILLING

TO WORK THE PROGRAM AS YOU ARE.” MY SPIRITS SOARED! SHE HAD SAID TO ME WHAT I COULDN’T SAY TO MYSELF, BUT I NOW KNEW THAT IT WAS TRUE – I WAS VERY WILLING. IN THAT MOMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT I KNEW I’D BE OKAY, BECAUSE IN MY HEART AND FAITH I HAD WHAT IT TOOK. IN TIME, HER EXAMPLE HELPED ME LEARN TO GIVE THAT KIND OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO MYSELF.

I HAD TAKEN A CHANCE. I HAD TRUSTED. AND AS A RESULT, I LEARNED THAT I WAS WORTH SAVING, BY GOD AND MEN.”

“NOTHING WE DO, HOWEVER VIRTUOUS, CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED ALONE; THEREFORE WE ARE SAVED BY TRUST.” *REINHOLD NIEBUHR.*

“TURN TO MICAH FULL OF TRUST:”

BUT MICAH’S LAMENT ENDS ON A POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE NOTE. DESPITE THE DECAY THAT HE PERCEIVES ON EVERY SIDE, HE AFFIRMS THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO TRUST IN GOD AND CONTINUE TO

PRAY TO HIM. LAMENT DOES NOT LEAD TO PERSONAL DESPAIR. WITH GREAT EFFORT, THE PROPHET RISES ABOVE HIS THOUGHTS OF FAILING AND CONTINUES TO TRUST THE GOD BY WHOM HE HAD BEEN CALLED.

THOSE WHO DO NOT SEE SOCIETY'S GRIEF CANNOT LAMENT IT WITH PASSION. AND MANY DO NOT SEE CLEARLY THE PREVALENCE OF INJUSTICE IN SOCIETY PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY LACK WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE. WITH MICAH, WE PRACTICE JUSTICE, TRUST AND LOVE. AND THEN WE CAN NOT ONLY ENTER INTO THE SPIRIT OF THE PROPHET'S LAMENT, BUT ALSO JOIN HIM IN NEW COMMITMENT OF FAITH AND TRUST.

IT HAS BEEN POINTED OUT THAT ALL DEFINITIONS OF FAITH ARE STATEMENTS OF THAT WHICH IS IMPLIED IN THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. AMONG THE INNUMERABLE DEFINITIONS WHICH HAVE APPEARED, WE DESIRE TO CONSIDER ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT: TRUST. TO CONSIDER "TRUST" AS THE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF FAITH.

ACTUALLY, THERE CAN BE NO LEGITIMATE OBJECTION TO THE CHARACTERIZATION OF FAITH AS TRUST AS LONG AS IT IS CLEARLY BORNE IN MIND THAT IT IS A QUESTION OF DESIGNATING AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THE PROJECTION OF “TRUST” IS A PRIMARY DEFINITION IN OUR LIVES.

HEAR THE EPISTLE OF THE HEBREWS: “DO NOT, THEREFORE ABANDON THAT CONFIDENCE OF YOURS. IT BRINGS A GREAT REWARD. FOR WE NEED ENDURANCE SO THAT WHEN WE HAVE DONE THE WILL OF GOD, WE MAY RECEIVE WHAT WAS PROMISED.” WHEN I READ THIS PASSAGE IT SPEAKS VOLUMES TO ME IN THIS CURRENT TIME. THE EPISTLE SPEAKS RATHER ELOQUENTLY TO THE THEMES OF TRUST, ENDURANCE, AND CONFIDENCE. EACH OF THESE IS VITAL TO OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

ALL OF US ASK THE QUESTION FROM TIME TO TIME, “WHO IS IT THAT WE CAN TRUST?” AND BECAUSE WE ARE SOMEWHAT FRAIL HUMAN CREATURES. AND SO WE ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION AGAIN, “WHOM

CAN WE TRUST?” CAN WE TOTALLY TRUST OUR GOD? CAN WE TOTALLY PLACE OURSELVES IN HIS CARE AND LOVE THAT LET “HIS WILL BE TRULY DONE – ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN”? IT’S NOT ALWAYS EASY! AND FOR MOST OF US OUR ABILITY TO DO THIS IS AT TIMES WAVERING AND UNSTEADY.

BUT THE ANSWER TO FINDING TRUST IN GOD IS WELL ARTICULATED IN AN ISSUE OF FORWARD DAY BY DAY. “WHEN THE FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN, ALL WE HAVE IS THE RECORD OF THE PAST TO GUIDE US. WE CAN TRUST OUR GOD IN THE UNCHARTED FUTURE BECAUSE GOD HAS BEEN TRUSTWORTHY IN THE SACRED PAST. WE SEEK- AS OUR PREDECESSORS DID- TO DISCERN GOD’S WILL FOR OUR LIVES AND TO SEARCH EARNESTLY FOR THE POWER TO CONFORM THOSE LIVES, OUR DIRECTION TO GOD’S PURPOSES.

THE ABILITY TO TRUST IMPACTS HEAVILY ON OUR CONFIDENCE. THE CONFIDENCE WE NEED NOT JUST TO SURVIVE – AND JUST GROW

NOT IN THE MATERIAL SENSE, BUT IN THE FULFILLMENT OF OUR POTENTIAL AS CHILDREN OF GOD. DON'T WE OFTEN FEEL ONCE HAVING PASSED THROUGH A CRISIS THAT NOW THINGS WILL BE OKAY, ACCEPTABLE, EVEN FINE? AT LEAST FOR A LITTLE WHILE? I KNOW I DO – “WHEN THAT’S OVER AND DONE” AND NOW FOR A LITTLE “UP TIME” – AND WHAT’S NEXT? ANOTHER BLOW CAN SHATTER OUR CONFIDENCE AND THREATENS TO “TAKE US DOWN.” THE EARLY FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST FACED THIS THREAT VIRTUALLY EVERY DAY. BUT THERE WAS A NEW FOUND JOY AND CONFIDENCE IN THE FAITH. BUT UNKNOWN TO THEM THEY WERE TO BE SEVERELY TESTED. AND WONDER OF WONDERS – SO ARE WE! DAILY. BUT THE EPISTLE TELLS US THAT DESPITE FEAR, SUFFERING, ABUSE, AND PERSECUTION, THOSE EARLY FOREBEARS AND WE OURSELVES KNOW THAT WE “POSSESS SOMETHING BETTER AND MORE LASTING.” YES, OUR CONFIDENCE CAN BE SEVERELY SHAKEN BY EVENTS. BUT WITH THE DEEP TRUST IN OUR GOD AS A FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE ENDURE, OUR CONFIDENCE RETURNS AND SUSTAINS US. THE 16TH PSALM PUTS IT WELL: “I WILL BLESS THE LORD WHO GIVES ME COUNSEL,

MY HEART TEACHES ME, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT. I HAVE SET THE LORD ALWAYS BEFORE ME BECAUSE HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND. I SHALL NOT FALL!” THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH. THAT THOUGH SEVERELY TESTED, WE ENDURE. FOR THE PSALMIST ALSO TELLS US: “YOU WILL SHOW US THE PATH OF LIFE. IN YOUR PRESENCE THERE IS FULLNESS OF JOY AND IN YOUR RIGHT HAND IS A DEEP TRUST.”

TRUST

OLIVER CROMWELL’S SECRETARY WAS DISPATCHED TO THE CONTINENT ON SOME IMPORTANT BUSINESS. HE STAYED ONE NIGHT AT A SEAPORT TOWN, AND TOSSED ON HIS BED, UNABLE TO SLEEP.

ACCORDING TO AN OLD CUSTOM, A SERVANT SLEPT IN HIS ROOM, AND ON THIS OCCASION SLEPT SOUNDLY ENOUGH. THE SECRETARY AT LENGTH AWAKENED THE MAN WHO ASKED HOW IT WAS THAT HIS MASTER COULD NOT REST.

“I AM SO AFRAID SOMETHING WILL GO WRONG,” WAS THE REPLY.

“MASTER,” SAID THE VALET, “MAY I ASK A QUESTION OR TWO?”

“TO BE SURE.”

“DID GOD RULE THE WORLD BEFORE WE WERE BORN?”

“MOST ASSUREDLY HE DID.”

“AND WILL HE RULE IT AFTER WE ARE DEAD?”

“CERTAINLY HE WILL.”

“THEN, MASTER, WHY NOT TRUST HIM AND LET HIM RULE THE PRESENT, TOO?”

THE SECRETARY’S FAITH WAS STIRRED, PEACE WAS THE RESULT, AND IN A FEW MINUTES BOTH HE AND HIS SERVANT WERE SOUND ASLEEP.

AS SAID TO A CHRISTIAN COUNSELOR:

“IT’S HARD FOR ME TO TRUST WHEN EVERYTHING LOOKS DARK.”

THE MAN REPLIED. “WELL BROTHER, IF YOU CAN’T TRUST SOMEONE IN DARKNESS OR WHEN HE’S OUT OF OUR FAITH, HE ISN’T WITH OUR GOD. SO, TOO, IF SOMETIMES WE CAN’T TRUST GOD IN THE DARK, WE MAY NOT CONSIDER HIM FULLY.” THEN POINTING TO A BABY CHICK THAT HAD JUST TAKEN REFUGE BENEATH A LARGE HEN, HE ADDED, “SEE THAT

LITTLE CHICK HIDING UNDER THE WING OF ITS MOTHER? AS LONG AS IT'S THERE, IT CAN'T SEE ANYTHING, BUT IT'S STILL PROTECTED AND SECURE." OPENING HIS BIBLE TO PSALM 91, THE COUNSELOR CONTINUED, "NOTICE IT DOESN'T SAY, "UNDER HIS WINGS SHALT THOU SEE, "BUT UNDER HIS WINGS, SHALT THOU TRUST.""