

Looking for the Light

a devotional from
ST. CHARLES AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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by Michael Jenkins

When Faith is Under the Weather

Scripture:

“What good does it do if someone says he has faith, but doesn’t do anything about it. Can faith save him?” (James 2:14)

Reflect:

The local national public radio station was doing a virtual round table of faith leaders in the area yesterday morning: a priest, a couple of pastors, a rabbi, with call-ins from the community. When I first tuned in, the rabbi and several Jewish folks who had called in, were discussing what it is like to observe Passover in the shadow of the pandemic.

A woman who called in said, “I’ve been thinking about what it means to be a Jew remembering a time when our people prayed God would deliver us from a plague while we are now at this moment praying God will deliver us from another plague. I’m not sure you get more Jewish than that.” Her comment struck me as both funny and profoundly faithful.

The program took a short break and I ran downstairs to fix a cup of tea. When I got back to the radio, an elderly Missionary Baptist minister was telling a story. He said that a few weeks ago not long after the pandemic began to sweep our country, the time had come for his wife to go to the hospital for a routine treatment for an unnamed chronic ailment. He said they debated whether or not to go, given how dangerous it might be just to visit the hospital. After debating the question, they decided that they needed to “have enough faith” to trust God to protect them from the disease. So they went to the hospital, and because they had faith, neither of them got sick.

These two comments on the radio stand in stark contrast. The first recognizes that dangers come along steadily in life. We pray for the best and leave the outcomes to God, and we are sure we aren’t the first and we won’t be the last people of faith to live our lives hanging by the thread of hope. But we are also sane enough to see that whether we have faith or not, bad things may come our way. Which is why that converted rabbi Saul of Tarsus reminds us that “in life and in death we belong to God.”

I’m not going to get into the ill logic of the minister’s story — did they not have faith enough to keep the minister’s wife from getting the chronic disease for which she needed treatment in the hospital in the first place? — but I do want to note the problem of faith that becomes sick enough to turn into magical thinking. Having faith in God does not mean that we should tempt God with acts of blatant dumbness or recklessness.

There's an old story about the fella whose house was built right next to the Mississippi River. The river was threatening to flood so the sheriff's department came to his door and told him to evacuate. "I've brought my pickup," said the sheriff, "so you can even take a few precious items from your home." The old fella said, "I am a man of faith. God will protect me." The river began to rise, and the old man's house was surrounded with water. A neighbor in a boat floated up and said, "I've come to rescue you." "Go away," the old fella said, "I am a man of faith. God will protect me." The river rose to its highest level in a century, and the old man had to climb up onto his roof to escape the flood. A helicopter came, and the rescue team shouted down. "We've come to save you from the flood." The old man told them to go away too. He said, "I am a man of faith. God will protect me."

The old fella drowned. And when he appeared at the Pearly Gates, St. Peter said to him, "Why are you here?" The old man said, "I am a man of faith. I believed that God would protect me." To which St. Peter said, "You dingbat! God sent you a sheriff with a pickup truck, a man in a boat, and a helicopter rescue team to rescue you. God has been trying to protect you."

My message, my dear friends: Take every precaution. Stay inside. Practice social distancing. Do what the health care community is telling us to do. God sent them to help us get through this flood of disease. Sometimes faith means trusting what God has provided and using the commonsense God has given us. Faith does not preclude human participation.

Questions to reflect on:

Trust in God might be defined as the very essence of faith? If "trust in God" doesn't mean getting exactly what we ask God for, what might it mean?

We often quote the passage from St. Paul that reminds us that "in life and in death, we belong to God." What is the meaning of "faith" in relation to this passage?"

Pray:

Gracious and loving God, we place in your hands our lives and the lives of all those we love and the lives of people everywhere threatened by this pandemic. We do trust you. We do have faith in you. Whatever may come, we trust that you are doing better things than we can ask for. Amen.

To send us your prayer requests, click on [this link](#) and our church staff and prayer group will add you to our weekly prayer list. You will have the option to specify your request as confidential.

If you would like to contribute to our daily devotionals, please email Pastor Sarah, sarah@scapc.org.

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