

“Carrying On” Joshua 3:7-17; I Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12 Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37
10-30-05

You'll Never Walk Alone

When you walk through a storm,
Hold your head up high,
And don't be afraid of the dark.
At the end of a storm,
There's a golden sky,
And the sweet silver song of a lark.
Walk on through the wind,
Walk on through the rain,
Though your dreams be tossed and blown..
Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart,
And you'll never walk alone..
You'll never walk alone.

I am not sure where or why that little song came to me this past week as I was thinking about this morning's sermon. But, there it was, playing over and over again in my brain. Maybe it was due to the long period of unsettled weather we had and the fact that I was looking forward to a few decent days of sunshine. Maybe it was because of the condition of our world, unsettled and shaking its inhabitants to their very roots by occurrences in nature and activities in the halls of power. All I know is that I sensed a storminess, a restlessness all around.

Then I remembered that this Sunday is known as Reformation Sunday throughout Protestant Christendom. On October 31, 1517, a German monk, Martin Luther, set about to reform the Catholic Church. He had drawn up a list of 95 ways in which he thought the church might improve itself. To make a statement he had nailed this list to the doors of the castle in Wittenberg, Germany. He intended to work for reform within the church-- instead he caused a storm and found himself thrown out of the church for all his trouble.

While we like to point to the selling of indulgences by the church as the major cause of his discontent, it went far deeper than that. He did not like the commercialized and impersonal relationship with

God that the sale of indulgences represented. He believed that the faithful should have a more personal relationship with their Creator.

Through the development of Protestantism the role of the priest as the essential mediator between a person and God was eliminated.

This was a major change in the way things had been done in the past. It was a challenge to the power and control of the church.

When I thought of Moses and Joshua and Jesus and Paul, that song began to play in my mind, again. It's simple and it's encouraging and it's hopeful. It can speak volumes to our human condition. I am certain many of us have thought those words when we needed to face something that was very difficult and when we were not sure we could go forward in life.

I suspect Joshua, was at least a little concerned when he took the reigns of the nation Israel from Moses' competent hands. As we know they had been a difficult headstrong group of people who liked to turn away from the pathway God had set before them. They believed it was easier to move along on their own than it was to put up with the many rules and regulations that were meant to make their lives more orderly. Joshua must have hoped that God would be with him as he had been with Moses. To show that this presence was not a fleeting thing and was and is eternal, we saw another parting of the waters in this morning's reading that was meant to prove to the nation that God was still around although Moses was not. If we remember any of our Bible stories about Joshua, we know that he is the fellow that fought the battle of Jericho and that the walls of that city came tumbling. There is a song about that event, too. No matter what it was Joshua had to do in life, he had no problem carrying on because he knew that God would always empower and uphold him.

Jesus wanted to impart this same message to those who followed him. He knew well the officials of the church and their hard line in teaching the wisdom of the Old Testament. He knew that the most value in a life was not the eloquence one used when telling others about the right way to live. He knew that words were not the best examples for people to follow. Jesus understood that a person's actions always spoke louder than his or her words. He taught that the way we treated one another was the way we ultimately treated him. He told people these essential truths but he also taught them by the living of his life. He knew we all had to practice what it is we preach or try to teach others. Any parent knows that he or she is closely watched and mimicked by his or her children. If we choose to say one thing and then by our example of living show we do not follow our own words we are soon found out. And, our children, often do not hesitate to point out the difference between our words and actions. Our faith was never meant to be locked up in words, but to be lived and revealed to others. It is fine to preach love, patience and forgiveness but words without the actions are bare.

The little reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians pointed the way to right living. Paul and those who worked with him to establish that small church showed by their example how all things could work toward a good end no matter what storms the members of that church might face. And, there were many days of difficulty and persecution. But, Paul encouraged them and strengthened them through his words and through his example. He trusted that they had seen enough of him to want to emulate the way he lived and moved and had his being. Although he could not be with them he believed that their faith in the good news would help them carry on.

We all face many ups and downs in life. Some wonder how it is that they will be able to survive the difficulties they face. Often we are inspired by the example of others who have

managed to carry on in spite of illness, economic losses or other difficult times. I have encountered several people who have asked me what I think the meaning of their lives is especially when they are suffering. This is a hard question. What is the value of a human life? I think that many of us ask this question from time to time, not always expecting an answer. When I am pressed to say something I think before I respond. I know life can be hard but it can also be beautiful. Most often I tell people struggling with life that they are showing others, by their example, how to cope with grace and strength. If they are elderly and wonder why it is they are still living, I remind them that there is God's time as well as our time. We often forget this believing we are all captains of our fate.

Other inspire us, just by the way they live. I can think of many, right here, in this community who go on day after day even when they do not really feel like it. They practice what they preach.

Those who carry on best are those, who, like Joshua and Jesus and Paul, sense that the presence of God is with them and will never abandon them. They understand there will be "a golden sky" and the "sweet silver song of a lark" following any storm they may face or even when they cross over into the next level of life. Amen