

"15 minute sermon"  
Rick Carlberg  
Salem United Methodist Church  
August 25, 2013

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 71:1-6; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

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**Sermon title:** "I have this sofa"

For those of you here last week, you know that I have a tough act to follow today. There is no way I can even come close to the inspiring words from Clarissa, words and spirit that had this sanctuary jumping. I will say one thing about last week: you found out at the same time I found out that I was giving the message today. In fairness, Clarissa and I had discussed the possibility of her having to visit her parents and I would have to give a message. I just did not know what date it would be. Well, now we know. It is today. In all seriousness, we need to keep Clarissa and her parents in our prayers and Clarissa in her journey, as well as her daughter Marissa... and they will be addressed in our prayer concerns after the message.

[pause]

It is not often we read the Psalms in our lectionary.... And when we do it is frequently after the other Old Testament reading. I asked for that change, as I have a very linear mind, and in this group of lectionary readings today, the Psalm is attributed by many to King David. The writings of Jeremiah are roughly 400 years after David, and the Luke reading 600 years after Jeremiah, so there is a span of about 1,000 years. Their messages build on one another and collectively give us insight how we should be leading our lives.

Psalm 71 is considered to be written toward the end of King David's life. It is a plea for comfort. Verses 1 – 3 show how he views God, as a fortress he always has taken refuge in. In verses 4 and 5 he pleads to be rescued from the wicked, the unjust and the cruel. But it is verse 6 that gives the punch line: "I have leaned upon you since I was born" and an additional sentence: "My praise is continually of you."

Jeremiah's story is toward the beginning of his life. He is just a young person, about 14 years old, when he has this discussion with God. God begins the conversation by telling him that he knew him before he was born and God had already consecrated him, a prophet even before he was conceived. Jeremiah is taken aback and says he is only a boy, one who does not know how to speak. God has none of that. He gives Jeremiah words and protection wherever God sends him. To seal the deal, God takes his hand and touches the mouth of Jeremiah, appointing him over the nations and symbolically putting words in his mouth.

While not in today's reading, Jeremiah goes on to become a priest, leads a long life and is present at the downfall of the state of Judah, when everyone is carted off to Babylon. He is not afraid to go before the last 3 kings of Judah over 23 years, all of them bad rulers, and tell them just the way it is: the end is near of their kingdom.

The passage from Luke is about Jesus healing a crippled woman. Now, while there are many stories of his healing people in the gospels, this is one he does on the Sabbath, the day of rest. The woman he heals has been this way for 18 years. She cannot stand straight, but in moments after laying hands on her, she is well. She begins praising God, much to the ire of the local priests and leaders of the synagogue. They are furious with Jesus because he did some work on a day he was not supposed to. Jesus directly answers their criticism: You let your animals have a drink on the Sabbath don't you? Is she not more valuable than that? The crowds surrounding Jesus rejoice at his reaction.... and his shaming the leaders of the synagogue.

So we have 3 stories, told over a 1,000 year period, and I believe they have a common thread. With the faith that the 3 authors, David, Jeremiah and Jesus have, the message is this: do not hesitate to do good work.

It was faith that motivated David at an early age to calm Saul with his lyre playing and later to slay Goliath. He spent many years in the wilderness of Israel, living like an animal fleeing his opponents, but he had the faith to endure these trials. With God's blessing he became king, establishing his capital in the already ancient city of Jerusalem, a city with its roots in the stone age. The kingdom of Israel had begun, spanning from the Gulf of Aqaba to the south to some 100 miles north of modern day Damascus, Syria. One can only imagine the physical struggles, the hand to hand combat David endured to build this kingdom. Yes, he was human and made some well documented errors, such as having Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba killed, so he could marry her, but as we see in today's Psalm reading he kept his faith. Given the struggles he faced, he was motivated. He took action because of his faith. David struggled with internal strife and external kingdoms trying to take over the land of Israel. These were life and death matters he dealt with on a daily basis.. and it was his faith that made him act and assure his legacy as a leader.

Skip ahead 400 years and we see how times change. Not only has the kingdom of Israel been broken up into 2 kingdoms, Israel and Judah, the Israeli kingdom has fallen, its people deported, and Judah is in the final years of its existence. The Babylonian army is not taking no for an answer. ... and the young Jeremiah has just received his calling. I get the impression that Jeremiah actions were a bit different toward these last kings of Judah. Rather than telling them how evil they were, he advises them to let the inevitable happen, to surrender to the overwhelming Babylonian army and allow the people of Judah survive in exile. God will take care of the people, and as we now know, allow them to return to re-

establish the temple in Jerusalem, only 50 years later. Jeremiah's message to these kings put him in peril. He was put in prison several times, had to bargain for his life, but still stayed true to the word of God. He overcame his reluctance to speak. He overcame his fear of being executed. He overcame his hesitation to be a prophet. His faith in God kept him motivated to do God's work.

600 years later, we find Jesus acting without hesitation. It does not matter that it is the Sabbath, he heals the woman who has been suffering for some 18 years. His actions stir up anger in the religious leaders of the synagogue, which no doubt contributes to his execution in Jerusalem.

Their faith got them through the facing of life and death issues. It got them motivated to act outside of their comfort zones. David could have kept his day job as a shepherd, playing his lyre occasionally to pass the time. Jeremiah could have just become a priest, who rarely ventured outside the temple and kept his opinions to himself. Jesus could have just been a carpenter. They didn't. They became the people God intended them to be, taking great risks of life and limb for a purpose bigger than themselves.

[pause]

Now, to make it applicable to us, I do not sense any of us have been called to be nation builders on the scale of David, advise kings as Jeremiah or become like Jesus crucified on a cross. We can act locally, however. We can support Just Live in their outreach to prevent suicides, support Imagine Kenosha in Bristol in their after school tutoring of children, take time to cultivate and weed our Hope Gardens, contribute to our local food banks with food, money and our time to volunteer. The list goes on, right here in Kenosha county.

[pause]

Our lives are busy. The demands on us to keep a roof over our head and food on the table are great. My work, while I enjoy it, drains me mentally and the last thing I want to do when I come home from a day at work is go out and do something outside my comfort zone, which I define as my home. Home is a place where I can take off my shoes and wear shorts and a t-shirt while drinking a beer. There is ESPN and the Golf channel to watch on our flat screen HD TV in front of that comfortable sofa, and did you know that college and professional football is about to start? You may have a sofa like mine, soft to the touch, squishy, so when you sit down or lay down in it, you become part of it. My sofa is so comfortable that I have been known to fall asleep on it within 15 minutes after sitting on it. If you doubt my words, just ask Joanna.

[pause]

This is the struggle. **Worldly comforts are a tough thing to overcome after a day dealing with the world.** Worldly comforts are tangible. I can taste the beer; I can see and hear the football game; I can feel the relief in my feet by going barefoot. As I prepare these words, I realize that worldly comforts are my temptation... and I succumbed to them on an almost daily basis.

While worldly comforts are tangible, our faith is intangible. It is not something we can touch, taste, see or hear, *but it is something we feel*. It is something we can act on. We can be motivated to get up from our sofa to be the people God wants us to be. We have the 3 examples in our scripture today to guide us, even if it is just our little corner of the world. We do not have to do nation building. We do not have to advice kings. We do not have to be savior of the world. However, we are encouraged to do our part as God directs us.

So remember the lifelong faith of David, the acceptance of Jeremiah's call and his courage to advice kings with an unpopular message, and the love of God as exemplified by Jesus who challenged the status quo and healed a woman on the "wrong" day of the week. They were highly motivated to do God's will in their lives. No creature comforts, no desire to be self-serving, no sofas in their lives.

There is no easy answer about how we react to the readings of the scripture today. As I have just admitted, I know I can do more, once I get off my sofa. Please consider how God is challenging you and whatever sofa is in your life to overcome, to be the person God wants you to be, helping others with greater struggles than ours. There are many opportunities to act locally, why you can focus on opportunities just west of the I if you want to... and still make a difference.

So let's get off our sofas and make a difference as God directs us.

Amen

### **Prayer Concerns**

#### **Benediction:**

Let us go out into the world motivated by the spirit. Go out with a committed spirit looking forward to what God has in store for us. Live your life in reverence to God. Be committed to this life we call Christian. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, but no sitting on your sofa this week. Amen.