

## LIFE AS A CENTIPEDE IN SHOES

Ezekiel 2:1-5, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, Mark 6:1-13

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost (8-7-12)

Rev. Steven D. Spencer, Pastor

Have you ever had one of those days? You know the type of day I'm talking about, the type of day that you think Murphy's Law was coined by an optimist. The type of day you think you're a centipede in shoes. And you keep waiting for the other shoe to drop and drop and drop. If you've ever felt that way, you're not alone. Dale Carnegie published a book in 1948 called: "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living." In his book he said we Americans worry more about things than any other people in the world. We spend 98% of our time worrying about things with a less than 2% probability of occurring. He went to say that because of this we have heightened blood pressure, acute anxiety disorders, mental illness, physical illness; the list goes on and on. To say the least we are stressed out, about things with a less than 2% chance of ever occurring.

Maybe you're thinking, "You mean I've been spending all this time worrying about things I didn't need too?" The answer is yes. There are indeed things that will happen in your life but worrying about them won't change them one iota. You may have to talk with someone who is belligerent. You may have to deal with people who hurl insults at you. But what is the worst thing they can do to you? Make you feel uncomfortable? Hurt you physically? Even kill you? The answer is yes to all of these. But can they take your immortal soul? The answer is most certainly NOT! And what occurs in this life is only moment in the eye of eternity. Yet where our sight is, where our heart is, where our treasures are, there are our worries! If your treasures are things of this world then your worries are about things of this world. But if your treasures are eternal, those heavenly treasures then there is no need to worry, no one can wrestle those away. And that leads us to our readings today.

Imagine for a moment being a pastor receiving a call to serve a congregation. In the call description it says: "We are a stubborn and obstinate people who don't always listen. We are rebellious people. Would you take that call? Pastor Ezekiel in our Old Testament text didn't have the option on whether to accept or reject it that call. God raises him to his feet, fills him with His spirit and says: **"Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen-- for they are a rebellious house-- they will know that a prophet has been among them."** And here's verse 6, which was not included in our reading: **"And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."** What a call!

Pastor Paul in our Epistle reading had it no better. The Corinthians had become a stubborn and obstinate people. They were self-centered. And they were allowing themselves to become dazzled by the spectacles of the traveling preachers who were also self-centered. Preachers busy bragging about themselves, trying to convince the Corinthian Congregation that one of them should be their pastor. And now the Corinthians have the audacity to ask Pastor Paul to brag about himself, tell us, tell us why you should be our pastor. We see Pastor Paul's answer them just one verse before our reading. 2 Corinthians 12:6: **"For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. (NKJV)"** Pastor Paul goes on to tell of his weaknesses. And the Lord says to him: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

There's the problem. The world tells us not to be weak. Be strong; be in control, if it's meant to be it's up to me. The focus is all about me, what I do and what I have. Ultimately, then, where does the finger point? It points to self. Paul continues in Verse 10: **"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am**

**strong.**” Where is Pastor Paul’s focus? Where does he point his finger? He says, **“That is why, for Christ’s sake,”** his focus, his vision is on Christ. If it were not he could never delight in his weaknesses, in the insults, in the hardships, in the persecutions or in any difficulty.

What about Pastor Jesus? He returns to Nazareth the place where He grew up. You’d expect His return would be a joyous celebration. After all they knew of His great teachings and miracles. But what do we see, “a stubborn and obstinate people.” ***“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him”***

Where was their focus? How did they see Jesus? They saw Him through a filter, a filter of their flesh and personal experiences. They had determined already who He was, according to their own understanding. We have the same problem today. The world has never seen a miracle; therefore miracles don’t exist. The world has never seen anyone raised from the dead; therefore Jesus never rose from the dead. And if Jesus never rose, then what good is He to me?

Jesus utters these words to them: ***“Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”*** Here is Jesus, God and Man not being honored: by His hometown, by His relatives or by His household. Should we expect any differently for ourselves? The end result is that He couldn’t do any miracles there except to heal a few by the laying on of hands. He was amazed by their lack of faith. The New King James Version says: ***“He marveled because of their unbelief.”*** Luke’s Gospel tells us that the people demanded miracles and rose up against Jesus because He did not provide them any. So they drove Him out of the city to the edge of a cliff desiring to cast Him off of it. He provided them a miracle all right; He disappeared from their sight.

Where was their focus? It was on self. And that’s where the focus always is for a stubborn and obstinate person or people. Ultimately what makes a person that way is unbelief. And the eyes of unbelief always look inwards. It’s interesting that the unbelieving person, regardless of what their unbelief concerns, typically is absolutely sure of why they don’t believe. They are insistent upon it! One of my favorite Mark Twain quotes says: ***“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”*** Typically unbelief becomes manifested in insults, anger and hostility.

What did these 3 men have in common? They were all called to speak, to teach, and to proclaim the message of salvation. And they all were facing a group of stubborn and obstinate people. Did they quit? Did they give in? Did they focus on themselves? NO! They kept the focus on God, on His task, on His plan for them and for you and for me.

When Jesus’ own hometown, relatives and household rejected Him what did He do? The last part of verse 6 tells us: ***“Then Jesus went around from village to village teaching.”*** He didn’t quit because His eyes were focused on the important task of sharing the Good News of Salvation and then completing it for our salvation.

We too need to ever remain focused on the Good News of our Salvation found in the cross of Jesus Christ. If you do, then regardless of whatever type day you have, even when you feel like a centipede in shoes, know that day will end as a good day. Because Jesus never gave up and continued to the cross for you and for me. That’s why you can be assured that all your sins are forgiven, for Jesus sake! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name, Amen and amen.

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen!*