

Endurance

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord

“As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord.”

Many of us are familiar with this verse from the Bible. It is Joshua 24: 15 Well, the other day I received a facebook post from Rev David Seymour, a former pastor of St. John’s. It was from the Chicago Lutheran Seminary. It was set in a formal background like scripture often is. I was thinking it was the scripture quote for the day. It read “As for me and my house, we shall stay where we’re at.” It was from the first book of Isolations chapter 24: verse 7 that is, Isolations 24:7.

In truth we do not need to be writing a new book for the Bible during these times of trial we are presently in. The Bible is filled with such stories. We see the prophets, Job and many others going through extraordinary times of trial and testing. It is just that now, that we have joined them in our very own time of trial.

Our scripture that Tracey read this morning speaks to us about the power to endure. In Romans 15:5, Paul is asking that the Christians in Rome care for each other as Jesus cared for everyone. Paul is praying that God will give them the blessings of endurance and encouragement to do the hard work of being a follower of Christ. Paul writes: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement, give you the same

attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.” Paul is praying to God to bestow endurance and encouragement so that they may be good Christians.

What would this blessing of endurance look like for us today in the time of pandemic? How are we to endure in our faith in these times?

In the Gospel of John that Tracey also read, Jesus refers to his followers being scattered, each to his own home. Sound familiar?? But then Jesus reassures them that they will always find peace in Him.

These are they words we need to hear in the seemingly endless isolation we are in and the months of restrictions we still face.

Endurance is the ability to withstand hardship or adversity. It is something we sometimes seek, like a marathon runner training for a race. Or working with a horse to perform complex actions. The training isn't always fun but it leads to a goal worth achieving. It is a chosen goal worked for, over time, step by step, enduring inconvenience, pain and some hardship knowing that the goal is worth the effort. Step by step, slowly getting closer to the goal every day.

But sometimes we have no choice in what we have to endure. We are given a situation that we would never have chosen. We are asked to sacrifice for the greater good to protect ourselves and others. We are asked this in times of war and

times of natural disasters, and now, in time of pandemic. It is hard to endure. It is hard to be patient, not knowing how long we need to endure.

Yet we do have a choice, the choice of what we will do with this time. First of all, we must recognize that, as Jesus promised, we are never alone. That God is with us. That Jesus tells us to take heart and he will give us peace.

And we need to remember that we have all have had to endure in our lives. If we have had children, ever played a sport, studied in school or worked hard at a job, we know something already about endurance. So the question should be not how much can we endure but how we endure what has been given to us.

We know from our life experiences that when we have a goal that matters we need to take it one step at a time. Dear Abby once said that if a woman had to look at all the dishes she would wash in her lifetime, she would never start. But if she only sees so much each day, it can all be done.

One step at a time. And we are never taking those steps alone.

When was thinking about this sermon, I remembered a story I would like to share about a most extraordinary journey that a man of faith took on a ship named the Endurance. His name was Ernest Shackleton and the year was 1914.

The challenge Shackleton and his men undertook was to reach the south pole in Antarctica. They knew that it was a perilous adventure. But they did not know it was one doomed to failure. They did not know that they would be stranded in unbearable conditions for over two years. Their ship, the Endurance, became trapped in ice for months and was finally crushed by the pressure from the ice. They abandon the ship on October 26, 1915 and set out on foot across a vast expanse of that ice, across freezing seas with crushing waves and across frozen mountains to try to find rescue. They dragged three lifeboats with them hoping against hope to reach the ocean. They took nothing of any weight with them from the ship. They even had to leave the ship's bible. But Shackleton kept one page from the bible, a page from the book of Job. It read:

Job 38: 29-30 Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.

The Book of Job is one that recounts the trials and testing of a good man. After Job is beset with tribulations and lost everything he has, his friends come to him and give him poor advice. Finally, Job calls on God Himself. The Bible says that God speaks to Job out a storm, questioning Job if he can even begin to understand how God alone has created all things and that God's power is unchallenged. The lines that Shackleton took were a reminder that all is in God's hands.

The story of their journey is absolutely unbelievable. The odds of them surviving were zero. They needed to cross an endless expanse of ice then sail in the 3 lifeboats for seven days in seas with monstrous waves and hurricane winds to an island. But the island they reached was out of any shipping lane so there was no chance of anyone finding them there. To be rescued, Shackleton and 5 of the men took one of the lifeboats and sailed another sixteen days to reach an island with a whaling station. Once they reached the island, they had to cross a frozen mountain range to reach the station. A rescue was then organized and the men left behind were saved. Of the 28 men on the voyage, all survived. In all they endured, they never gave up.

Let me read to you what Shackleton, a man of faith, said about the miraculous protection he felt as he struggled to lead them to safety. Recounting the final part of his journey to rescue his men, when Shackleton and some of his men left the others and crossed frozen mountains in that final, desperate attempt to get help, Shackleton writes

When I look back at those days, I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across those snowfields, but across the storm-strewn sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing place on South Georgia. I know that during that long and racking march of 36 hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia, it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, "Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was

another person with us." Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech, in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would be incomplete without a reference to a subject very near to our hearts.

God was with Shackleton. Shackleton and the others could feel a physical presence in their time of extreme endurance. They knew that they had made it because God was with them. They should never have survived but they endured.

In our time of trial we need to be aware that God is with each of us. We have a partner in our endurance of these times. One whom is beside us and with us every step of the way.

Let us endure this time with faith in God's love and care. Let us endure with hope for the future that God will provide. And let us endure with love for each other so that we may have patience with the restrictions that protect us all.

Paul said it so well later in Romans when he prayed (15: 13)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Let us all endure.

Amen.

