

God of Reassurance

Romans 15:05b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Somebody came up last Sunday and said to me, "It's interesting that you've been talking about discouragement because I don't think I have ever before in my life met so many of my friends who are having trouble with real despair." I don't know how many of you have found that, but there does seem to be something in the air. I don't know what it is. This year, or these years, there seems to be in many of our lives a real battle with despair and discouragement.

You remember we talked about the teenage situation where the chief cause of death in teenagers in high school is not the road accidents but it is suicide. You probably read in the newspaper as I did last week that in one school there were three kids who committed suicide, it seemed to me in the same two week period. We talked about the reasons that we thought there were for that. How more and more of us see so little point in living these days. How many of us feel the whole thing is really dependent on the whim of some Gaddafi [a Libyan revolutionary] or some madman that will set off a nuclear explosion. So we're beginning to wonder how stable the situation is anyway.

We said how some of the teenagers feel that. They feel there isn't much point to life. In America you won't starve anyway so we don't have to struggle for our food and shelter the way we had to. So why live? There seems to be no challenge to it. Remember we mentioned that some of them probably look at us and see us on the other hand making such a to-do about little getting more food or shelter or a few more shekels when any moment we could all be blown to bits. They wonder, are you adults mad that you spend your time trying to make yourself comfortable in a world which we can't guarantee you'll be in for very long? So we discussed the kind of reasons there might be in the teenagers for that kind of despair.

You remember we mentioned also on the other side of the coin is a completely different spirit. In another few weeks, or another couple of months the daffodils will be popping up and the snow will be melting away and we will have all the wonder and beauty of springtime and all the freedom that we see in little dogs and little babies and little animals, all seeming to come to life. On the other side of this whole atmosphere of despair and discouragement there is in our world a tremendous amount of life that moves to make us bright and cheerful and lifts us all the time. You remember how we discussed how in the oceans and rivers there seems to be a spirit of rejuvenation and of encouragement so that if we would just stop poisoning the river for just a little while it has within it such a spirit of revival and vitality that it will purify itself very, very quickly. So in our whole world there seems to be implanted a spirit of life, rejuvenation and vitality that is always lifting us up.

Yet on the other side there seems to be this dark spirit of kind of discouragement and depression that can hit us. Actually you know yourself; you must have got up in mornings when you felt that terrible taste in your mouth for one thing. Maybe the old headache and you think of something that's going to go wrong that day. You know it's going to go wrong. You're in despair and depression and you pull the drapes back and there the sun is blasting down. You say "Lord, can you ease it back a little and let me be miserable here for awhile?" It seems as though the Creator is just determined. He will not let us live in this despair and this discouragement.

Now where do those two different forces come from? Remember we looked up where one of them comes from. It's John 8:44. Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and he says, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." That's where the despair and discouragement comes from.

There is, loved ones, in this world -- whether we like it or not, actually -- a personal power of evil that Jesus calls Satan. He is a liar. He is always telling us, "You see those clouds there? Those clouds are final reality. Behind those clouds there's nothing, there's nothing. There's just dark thunder clouds and despair all around." He does everything to get you from taking an airplane flight. Because if you ever do you'll get up through those clouds and you'll see the sun shining there all the time. The clouds just cover the sun but the sun's always real. Satan's job is to persuade you that there is no hope. His job is to persuade you that reality is there is no hope for you. Everything is going to end up in despair, death, destruction and discouragement. That is his job. His job is to make you believe a lie about reality.

That's of course what we all do when we get despaired and depressed. We create a little world, a tiny little world, inside which everything is destruction and darkness. We believe that is the only real world. That is Satan's job if he can get us to stay in that little tiny world of unreality. Then he's got us.

That isn't reality. That isn't reality. Satan is not reality. Reality is Romans 15:5, this is reality. "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement" -- that's reality. Our Creator laughs most of the time. That's it. An old scholar called Law said, "God the Father and Jesus are unalterably happy." They're unalterably happy. They're just happy all the time. They're unalterably happy. When you see the sunshine, you see spring mornings, you see daffodils, and you see fresh breezes you're seeing what the heart of our Creator is. You're seeing the one who made us able to laugh and the one who made us able to smile. You're seeing the one who makes light the norm and darkness only the inter-light.

Reality is that God our creator is a God of steadfastness and encouragement. He is always lifting us, always making things bright. He's always moving to improve things in our lives. Now how do you allow that to come into your life? How do you allow that reality to come into your life and to begin to govern your life?

Here's where many of us fall into the power of positive thinking instead of rising into faith. Many of us hear this truth and say yeah, that's right. I agree with you, Pastor. God I can see, the things outside that he makes, the things we haven't spoiled are all bright. All we have to do is look through those windows and look how bright it is. It's brighter than even these lights here. It's far brighter than anything we can create. I know we can't imitate the daffodils. They are beautiful. We can't imitate the trees blowing in the breeze. That's beautiful. So I agree with you. God is a happy God. He is bright and living. How do I live in that reality?

At that point many of us fall into the power of positive thinking instead of rising into faith. That is, we get up in the morning and we say, "I feel miserable but God is a God of steadfastness and encouragement. Yeah, that's it. God is a God of steadfast and encouragement. Yeah, God is a God of steadfast and encouragement. Yeah, God is steadfast and encouragement. I must remember that. That's reality. God is encouragement and steadfastness. That's it. God, yeah, I may be miserable. I may be

sad. I may be depressed, but God is a God of encouragement and steadfastness.” We try to brainwash our poor old heads into being uplifted by the sheer thought that God is in fact the being who is steadfast and who is always encouraging.

Loved ones, it's unreal. It's like being on the freeway, running out of gas. It's 10 below zero and you sit there frustrated, fed up with yourself, irritated with yourself. Then you try to deal with that frustration and irritability by thinking of the service station that is just half a mile up the road with a service station attendant that you know so well who can put 3 gallons of gas in a can and he'll give it to you. That's what you do. You just sit there and think, “Oh, I feel so much better now when I think of that service station up there, half a mile up the road, and that dear friend of mine who can put that gas in the can and give it to me. Ah, that makes me feel so much better.” Well it won't. It will just frustrate and irritate you more and more.

Thinking is must a mental action. Thinking won't enable reality to come in upon you. Faith is action that frees God to actually change the circumstances in your life. Faith is not thinking positively. Faith is acting on what you know is true about God that frees him to act in your life and change the circumstances in it.

I'll give you an example. If you turn to Genesis 12:1-4, it's back about 2,000 BC. Faith comes from hearing God's word and from allowing it to impinge upon you. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.'"

So Abraham exercises faith you see in verse 4. "Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him." Now Abraham did what God told him to do. He acted in the light of what God had said. So let's go further down in his life a little to verse 10. "Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.' When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, and menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels.

But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, 'What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, "She is my sister," so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone.' And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had. So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb."

That's God's patience. Because Abraham began to live his life and arrange the actions of his life in accordance with what God had told him, God was able to manifest his own patience in Abraham's life by changing circumstances which otherwise would have brought about his destruction. That is God's patience.

The Bible says its “hypomones”. Hypomones is two Greek words “hypo” and “mones” -- to “remain under a situation”. God will do that with even you. God will stay under you. As you fall back on him he'll hold you up. He'll do it again and again if you will set the main tenor of your life in accordance with what he's guiding you to do. If you will arrange your actions and your words in the light of the fact that God is a God of steadfast and is an encouragement, then if you do fail at a moment God himself will show his patience to you. You may say yeah, maybe once. Wait till you see this guy Abraham; he knew how to try God.

Turn to Genesis 20, this is 25 years later and the fellow should have gotten some sense by then. Genesis 20:1 "From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.'" He told the same lie 25 years later. "And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife.' Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, 'Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, "She is my sister"? And she herself said, "He is my brother." In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.' Then God said to him in a dream, 'Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now then restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours.'"

"So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, 'What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.' And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?' Abraham said, 'I did it because I thought, there is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do to me: at every place to which we come, say of me, 'He is my brother.'" So Abraham told the same lie over again.

Yet loved ones, the amazing thing is that God continued to prosper Abraham out of the sheer patience that he had for him. Now the Father is like that with you and me. The Father is patient. Our God is a God of steadfastness, of patience. Now you're right, his patience is not there to encourage us to be easy going or contemptuous of him. Remember there is a verse in the Bible that says "God's patience is meant to lead us to repentance." You might remember that God tested Abraham after that to see if he really did trust him. He asked him to give him his own son. To kill the only son that God had given him. When Abraham showed that he was ready to do it then God provided, you remember, a lamb caught in a bush for the sacrifice. So God will check you out to make sure that you're not just playing fast and loose with him and not just taking advantage of his patience.

Loved ones, God is a God of steadfastness and patience. If you act in accordance with that he will manifest that patience in your actual life. So there is no place for you to wonder, will God forgive me. Will God understand what I've done and be merciful to me? Of course he will. God is a God of steadfastness. He is a God of patience. But you will only know that if you act in accordance with that. In other words it's like your dear friend. If he keeps on drinking, drinking, drinking -- well there will be no manifestation of God's power or patience in his life. But if he will turn back, and

the amazing thing is, however many times he has to turn back, if he will turn back to the Father, God will exercise and manifest his patience and will change the very circumstances in his life.

That's what it means to begin to live in reality. Live on the basis of the fact that our God is a loving and patient Father who will always come the second mile if we will turn to him. We do have to turn. I just feel that God wants me to say this. Some of you I think know you should turn and you're waiting for something. You're waiting for something. You're waiting for something to happen. Or you're waiting for some feeling to come inside you. Don't wait. That's getting back to the freeway, sitting on the freeway thinking, trying to change your feelings. Don't bother about your feelings. Change today. Turn back today.

God is a God of patience. If God forgave Abraham after he told the same lie 25 years later, God our Father will show the same kindness towards you. He will remain under you even as you fall back upon him and he'll push you upright. You do have to turn and change your attitude and your way of life. You change the way you're going, that's it.

Could I press you on that once more? Because I think that God wants me to say it. Don't sit there resolving sometime I will do it. Sometime when I feel this a bit more strongly I will change. Change now. Stop doing whatever you're doing wrong now. Stop it now. Change now. Faith is action in the light of God's character. See, you can't sit there and say, "Well, I'm afraid. I'm afraid God won't forgive me. I'm afraid God won't forgive me." The Father is saying, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You've just heard how I dealt with Abraham. You just heard about how patient I am. Now you know, you know fine well, that I will forgive you. It's just you don't want to stop doing that thing and enter into a new relationship with me."

Loved ones, do it now. Change today, whatever it is. It may be some little habit that has been in your life for years. It may be some big thing that you know you should have changed long ago. Change today. Why? Because God is a God of steadfastness and encouragement, he's a God of patience. He will come right alongside you and will begin to change the circumstances of your life. A lot of you say, "Well, if I stopped doing this thing, I don't know what would happen. I do this thing to ensure that certain things go right in my life." Don't you see that Abraham's own life was prospered by God after he turned? God will actually do better than what your lie does. He will achieve more by his power than what your sin or your deception does. He will change your life and prosper it more than your sin can prosper it.

So he tells you now this morning, you see my patience. You see the kind of person I am. Now come on, give that up. Confess it to me now and I will begin to manifest my power in your life. I'd encourage any loved one here who has something in their lives that they've been afraid almost to come out and present to God -- present it this morning. Take action this morning. Let the God of patience begin to manifest his power in your life. Let's pray.

Dear Father, we cannot question that you are a God of patience and a God who has longsuffering beyond anything that we ourselves could be. We see Father how you dealt beyond any human patience levels, how you dealt with Abraham. Lord we know fine well that you're not going to switch around just because it's us coming to you. We know Father that you'll deal with us the same way. Yet we know you can't deal with us unless we actually change our life.

So Father we come before you now and we confess this thing that has been in our life for years, this attitude. Lord, we know it's wrong. We confess it to you now. We tell you Lord that we are repenting

of it right this moment. We're going to adjust the way we act. We are going to change our way of action. We are going to change the way we think. We are going to change that this morning, Lord. By your grace we're going to continue to operate in the right way. We ask you now Father to make up for whatever shortfall there may be in regard to our own life.

We ask you Father to begin to do for us what you did for Abraham. Begin to lead out our lives in a prosperous and successful way. Begin to bring it into alignment with your own dreams for us. Because Father we know that you want us to live in the midst of encouragement and in the midst of uplift and joy -- free and far above discouragement and despair. So Father we give ourselves to you in Jesus' name. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.