

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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STAND FIRM

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Text of a Sermon preached the Second Sunday of Lent

March 13, 2022

GENESIS 15:1-12,17-18 | PSALM 27

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1 | LUKE 13:31-35

The Psalmist proclaims:

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the Lord is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid? [...]

King David bravely asks his question because he is afraid. And so are we. We got up this morning and scrolled through the headlines

the rising price of gas, the same silly political fights, the senseless deaths of despair of young and old alike, the cutting, the overdoses, the distrust, the conspiracies, the inequities of our society. Those of us in our right mind are afraid. We are in the wilderness. It is Lent. Still....

Though an army should encamp against me, *
yet my heart shall not be afraid;
And though war should rise up against me, *
yet will I put my trust in him.”

Thursday night I watched the prize winning Netflix documentary on the 2014 street protests in Ukraine that sent Viktor Yanukovych to exile in Russia and Ukraine on a path of democratic independence as a part of Europe. After Yanukovych failed to sign a promised trade agreement with Europe and suddenly signed an agreement to concessions with Vladimir Putin, young and old alike occupied a central square in Kiev called the Maiden. From November to February of 2014, in the middle of a freezing winter, these citizens organized and refused to leave until Yanukovych called for new elections or left office. Afterwards, I had a more profound understanding for what it is for Ukrainians to be fighting for their basic human dignity, for the desire to not to live in slavery.

Friday morning I shot out of bed at the sound of an explosion. I wondered whether a tree - or a bomb - had fallen on my house. For an instant I thought I was dreaming about the dramatic street battles that lasted for three months, and ultimately led to hundreds of deaths.

It turns out that an old aerosol can had exploded in our linen closet in our upstairs hall. I can still feel the loud bang shaking me out of my dreams.... and then the silence after.... as if something absolutely terrible happened, out of the blue, in an instance, potentially changing everything. Can you imagine waking up one day to the reality that you have been invaded, that a war has risen up against you?

The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid? Afraid or not, the good news Jesus delivered by his victory in the wilderness is that we are not alone. And that we can indeed resist the devil, the tyranny of madmen, the coercion of bullies.

So, as Abraham Lincoln once said, in the midst of his temptation to give up finding a solution to a broken country – find the best place to put your feet and stand. And discover for yourself the reasons you will trust God and the ways you will join in the resistance.

Let me give you one more reason today to be hopeful, to understand where King David is coming from. It has to do with how much God loves us. How much he longs for us to throw off the yoke of sin and death and put our lives on a path of blessing and peace.

Our God is a God who has totally committed himself to us, as he did to Abraham. Our God is a God who would compare his passion for us to a mother hen defending her chicks, even though they reject her. Our God will go to any length to save us.

Jesus is informed that his enemies are indeed gathering around him, that Herod, that old fox, is trying to set a trap for him. Jesus knows well enough that he will be sacrificed. He smiles. It is not about him!

“Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

A mother hen doesn't really have a lot of firepower. It's all swagger. All bluster. Spread your wings. Puff out your chest. Sure, you can take me, but it isn't going to be pretty. What I have is my body. I will stretch out my loving arms on the hard wood of the cross. To get to those I love, you will have to kill me.

To sacrifice is to make sacred. Jerusalem is the Holy City because of the deaths of those who defended it, who were exiled from it, who returned to it. It was made sacred by the death of Jesus and its destruction by the Romans. It is the Holiest place on earth because it stands as the place God wishes to prepare to receive the fulness of his presence in a new heaven and a new earth.

Perhaps the city of Kiev will become for us a sign not unlike the Holy City of Jerusalem. It will show forth, in all its terrible and noble suffering, all that it takes to fight for human dignity, to live to be free, to resist not falling back into slavery and despair.

As the bombs fly over head, the buildings crumble, and the innocent suffer, the faithful will ask, as they will be more afraid than they ever have been, who, then, shall I fear? Will we join them in trusting in the Lord? Do you see how much God longs for us to find the right place for our feet so that we can stand?

When the storm comes, stand firm. When sickness invades your home, stand firm. When your friends abandon you, stand firm. When there doesn't seem to be any reason to go on, stand firm. Turn and hide yourself under the shadow of his wings. Realize he is doing the same for you.

Paul, though he was in prison, had figured this out. He is channeling the God who walked through holocaust while Abraham was in a trance and the God who never abandons Jesus. This message never changes.

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.” Stand firm.