

This morning, our Second Reading has shifted from James to Hebrews. We have the opportunity to listen into the book of Hebrews for the next seven weeks.

One of the aspects that separates Hebrews from other books in the bible is that Hebrews, itself, is a sermon.

The preacher of the sermon does not give us their identity. We can tell that they chose their words wisely and they wove them together in a beautiful and delicate manner.

They get straight to the point. Their sermon does not start out with an amusing story that connects the hearers to what the main point will be.

The sermon starts out by reminding the hearers that God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets. Now, God is speaking to us through the Son. The hearers were brought directly into an encounter with God. Many would say that we need such encounters today.

I think that it may be important for us today to know about this early church; especially if I may be leaning into them to preach. If they were filling out a ministry site profile to attract a new pastor, their lead in might be the following; if they were being one hundred percent truthful.

We started out as a very successful mission start congregation. However, over the years, we began to have friction with people outside of our community. This friction turned into hardship for us. We have rallied numerous times. But, alas, we have succumbed to discomfort and apathy.

Maybe, those words would not be too attractive to a pastor but they would be truthful and what was occurring in their context.

In the beginning, their worship and life together were filled with vitality. However, those outside their community began to point fingers at them and started talking about them in the marketplace. The church was different. The individuals outside of their church community did not believe that they were following the social order of the time.

The town really was unsure what this new community of believers were doing and what they were about. They just did not understand why they were focusing in on Jesus. They viewed the churches activities as suspicious and controversial. I mean there were plenty of traditional religious opportunities available; why would you be creating something new.

The church followers were able to resist the early push back. However, the threats against them began to become real. They saw that there were individuals in their church that were being arrested. With each arrest, they were wondering if they were doing the right thing and could they remain supportive of this new movement.

Over time, they did in fact become uncomfortable. With this discomfort, apathy became apparent and many would argue that apathy was the real downfall. They fell short of the kingdom of God.

What is apathy?

A classical definition of apathy is the following:

lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern

There are so many ways that we can go with apathy. I even contemplated if I should even touch on it. But, I decided that I would and that I would jump into the pool of apathy with two quotes:

The first one comes from an individual who many, if not all, have heard. Helen Keller. She states, "*Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all - the apathy of human beings.*"

The second one is a more recent quote from Eddie Vedder. To be honest, I have not followed him since his Pearl Jam days and I was introduced to them because they were a band that was dealing with real life issues. He would often take the news stories and use them as song writing material. He was asked about news today and he responded with the following:

With about a dozen assorted ongoing conflicts in the news every day, and with the stories becoming more horrific, the level of sadness becomes unbearable. And what becomes of our planet when that sadness becomes apathy? Because we feel helpless. And we turn our heads and turn the page.

Whether it be our world today, let us not turn on the news or read another news story or if we drive back into Hebrews, apathy is there for us and it was there for them.

In the early church, the excitement waned.

In the early church, they lost interest.

In the early church, their concern for the church dropped behind everyday life.

There were church embers who remained and stayed supportive. In their support, they reached out to those who were walking away. The members asked, “hey, why aren’t you coming to worship anymore?”

Those who left responded:

- We forgot about it
- We didn’t feel like it
- Simply neglecting it as a priority

Things are the same today in many corners of the world as it comes to church.

The preacher tries to bring the congregation around by pointing them to the radiance of the divine presence. The pointing all begins because of a hymn.

My sermon at this point may seem to go off the rails, so I am going to give you a warning. But, it is done with purpose.

Last week, I went in and visited Delane in the hospital. She passed away and when I met with the family, they gave me the list of hymns that she wanted as part of her service. I gave them to Cheryl and when she looked at the list she pointed out that one of the 8 am hymns is one she picked for her funeral. Day by Day. Extremely fitting. Hymns can be extremely powerful. The hymn can uplift and inspire the faith community. As the train goes off the rails, I want to share some of the lyrics from Day by Day and then I want to conclude with the gospel message given to us in the sermon that was read from Hebrews.

The lyrics:

Vs. 1: Day by day, your mercies, Lord, attend me, bringing comfort to my anxious soul. Day by day, the blessings, Lord, you send me draw me nearer to my heavenly goal.

Vs. 2: Day by day, I know you will provide me strength to serve and wisdom to obey; I will seek your loving will to guide me over the paths I struggle day by day. I will fear no evil of the morrow, I will trust in your enduring grace.

Vs. 3: Oh, what joy to know that you are near me when my burdens grow too great to bear; oh, what joy to know that you will hear me when I come, O Lord, to you in prayer. Day by day, no matter what betide me, you will hold me ever in your hand.

Hear the Gospel message from Hebrews:

Christ did not escape suffering. Instead, Christ entered fully into the situation of those who suffer. Christ was the pioneer, charting the course through the difficult landscape in order that we may follow.

Friends, Jesus is our sibling. He invites to participate in the construction of God’s reign. We are co-disciples of God. God is still speaking to us today. May we open our ears, listen to the call and know that as we journey through this world; God is with us every step of the way and as the hymn that Delane loved says, “Day by Day, I know you will provide me strength to serve and the wisdom to obey”.

AMEN.