

## Sermon May 22, 2011

### 1. Intro.

- a. Illustration: Brothers and sisters in Christ, my freshman year of college I took a course on Youth Ministry at Luther Valley Retreat Center in Colorado. While we were there, we had a great opportunity, the chance to repel down a 200 foot cliff face. We would be harnessed in, and using our hands and a pulley system, slowly work our way down the side of a mountain. To make things safer, we even had a mechanism that would slow us down if we got to going too fast. Those who had courage to repel down this rock face were rewarded with breath-taking views of God's majesty in the middle of the Rocky Mountains. The problem was, I'm afraid of heights. So after wavering about whether to go or not, I finally strapped into my harness and began the slow backwards walk to the edge of the cliff, and as I took my first step over the edge...I froze. All of a sudden I was filled with doubt, doubt that the anchors would hold, doubt that my ropes would break. And in the end, I missed out on an amazing opportunity, because of my doubt.
- b. Today we look at the strength of Christ, and how the hope we have in him allows us to face our fears and follow him, no matter where he leads.

### 2. Goal

- a. Stephen Illustration
  - i. In our first reading today, we were introduced to a man named Stephen, whom the book of Acts tells us, was **"a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit."** And this man Stephen went out proclaiming the love of Christ and the kingdom of God! He did miraculous signs and stood up to those who tried to silence the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And because of those beliefs, they dragged him outside the city and they stoned him.
  - ii. As they jeered him, we are told, **"he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."** And as they stoned him he cried out, **"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,"** and finally, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."** How we wish we had Stephen's faith.
- b. This is what we're called to, my Christian Friends. Instead of doubting ourselves or our faith, we're called to trust in God and do what he has called us to do. And just look at our reward, just look at what lies at the end of the road for the faithful! Stephen **"gazed into heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right of God."**
- c. You see, Stephen stood on the edge of his own rock face, he had to decide whether trust in this Holy Spirit that dwelt within him and risk his life, or to stay silent.
- d. Look at Stephen's heart, his courage, his faith. If Stephen were on that cliff top, he wouldn't saunter slowly over the edge, inspect his equipment, and then slowly descend. No Stephen goes running, bounding over the edge and into the loving embrace of his Savior to savor his final reward! We also are called to live for Christ, to proclaim his words! And we are to do this every day, in the way we live our lives, whether it is forgiving others, or caring for the sick or poor. Yet how often do our fears and doubts get in the way?

### 3. Malady

- a. Don't worry, my friends, we're not alone. Shift with me to our Gospel lesson. In this passage we hear the Christ boldly proclaim who he is and what he offers, but look how his disciples react.
  - i. Christ proclaims that he is going to prepare a place for them in the house of God, and that he will come back to get them.

- ii. But Thomas replies, **“Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?”**
    - iii. Christ even says, **“I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”**
    - iv. Yet instead of taking the leap of faith with Christ, Thomas wants to check the maps one more time before he takes the leap.
  - b. So our patient, loving Lord tries again, stating as clearly as possible, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.”**
    - i. But this time it is Philip who pipes up, **“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”** Philip wants to test the ropes one more time, make sure that everything is exactly how he wants it to be.
  - c. Aren't we like the disciples? We allow our doubts to get in the way of our faith, and when we do, it is often because we don't believe in ourselves. We either don't believe that we are good enough to be loved by God, or we don't believe that we have the power to do what God has asked. When we do that, we doubt God's ability to work in our lives, and we allow that fear to paralyze us into inaction.
- 4. Malady II
  - a. A religious man is on top of a roof during a great flood. A man comes by in a boat and says "get in, get in!" The religious man replies, "No I have faith in God, he will grant me a miracle."
 

Later the water is up to his waist and another boat comes by and the guy tells him to get in again. He responds that he has faith in god and god will give him a miracle. With the water at about chest high, another boat comes to rescue him, but he turns down the offer again cause "God will grant him a miracle."

With the water at chin high, a helicopter throws down a ladder and they tell him to get in, mumbling with the water in his mouth, he again turns down the request for help for the faith of God. He arrives at the gates of heaven with broken faith and says to Peter, I thought God would grand me a miracle and I have been let down." St. Peter chuckles and responds, "I don't know what you're complaining about, we sent you three boats and a helicopter."
  - b. Maybe our doubt doesn't always from a struggle to trust that God will work in our lives, maybe sometimes it comes from our struggle to allow God to work in his own way. Perhaps we think our way is better. Look at Philip, Christ says, "If you know me, you know the Father and have seen him." But Philip wants to *See* the Father. Christ's proclamation is all well and good, but Philip wants it his way. He's sure if he can just see the Father plainly, everything will be better.
  - c. Are we like Philip? Do we ever doubt not because God hasn't blessed us, but because he hasn't blessed us the way we want him too? Do we ever say, "I'd to this and this for God if he only had blessed with a certain gift or talent." Do we ever think that if God had just done something differently, we'd be better off?
  - d. Or are we like Thomas? Our doubt stemming from a lack of faith in the one who loves us most? Was Thomas afraid that Christ was going to leave for heaven, and Thomas would be lost, without a way of reaching his Savior? Are you?
  - e. What is the cliff face in your life? Where is God calling you to take the leap for him?
- 5. So what happens when we leap. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, when we trust in our Lord and Savior and take the leap of faith, leaving our fears and doubts behind we are set free! Just look

at your anchor! In 1 Peter 2 we heard God proclaim: **“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame!”** With Christ as your anchor you will never be put to shame! Instead, when we take that leap, we are rewarded with a view of God’s glory and his promises. Later in 1 Peter we see that those who are anchored are called out of darkness and receive the mercy of their Lord.

- a. And yet, our leaps are so small when you consider the leap of faith which Christ made. Those promises Christ made in our Gospel lesson, they came at a cost. Christ stood at the edge of the abyss, peered into a darkness and hopelessness that we could never imagine in our wildest dreams, and instead of demanding another way or shrinking away from the task; Jesus, prayed in the Garden, as beads of blood ran down his brow, “not my will, but yours, be done.” He then allowed himself to die on a cross, knowing the very presence of God would be taken from him. And he did this all because he trusted his Father and knew that when all was said and done, it would mean Salvation for you and I.
  - b. It is because Christ took the leap that no other person could take that we can cast our doubts aside and go running into the arms of our Savior. Surely he has died for us, and surely he has risen again, and our reward is assured. Our lives are no longer a perilous descent where any wrong footstep could send us falling into the abyss, away from the presence of God. But instead our Salvation is assured in the love of Christ! Because of this truth, we can live boldly, no longer doubting ourselves, but putting our faith in the Christ who has saved us. It is when our lives are found in him, that we can do things we never thought possible, because he will remove our doubt and lead us, for he is the way, and the truth, and the life!
  - c. And so, dear brothers and sisters, we too are called to take a leap of faith! But let’s not shirk away from this call, or go hesitantly, but instead, let’s jump! We have nothing to lose, for our salvation is assured in Christ. If we fall, he offers hope and forgiveness, and if succeed, he offers joy! What’s your rock face? Is it a fear of ministering to others? Is it a struggle with greed, lust, or addiction? Is it struggling to love that person that seems unlovable? If we try and descend these rock faces alone, we will surely fail! But we are never alone. God has placed his own Son beside us to guide us down in our leaps of faith. To rejoice with us in our triumphs, and perhaps more importantly, to bandage us up when we fall. In Christ we have the power and forgiveness to go boldly into whatever situation we might face, for he is our anchor, the Rock of our Salvation. So when that next opportunity to leap comes into view, seize the opportunity! For the Lord is with you, and he will guide you in success and in failure to strengthen your faith and to show you his love. Just as he did time and time again with Thomas, and does time and time again with us.
  - d. A week after my faltered attempt to repel down the rock face, I was given another chance, this time on a 50 foot rock face. Once again I sauntered over to the edge, said a silent prayer, and looked at the smiles of those around me, encouraging me on. Brothers and sisters in Christ, your Lord will give you opportunities again and again because he loves to see you succeed. Like Thomas, he will continue to love and forgive you, ever calling you to take that leap of faith that leads you into his loving, saving arms.
6. And so we put our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our anchor, and pray that we might take the leaps of faith which he puts in our lives, through the strength and love we find in Him. Amen.