

Soul Refresher: Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 29, 2019
2 Timothy 2:8-13
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

2 Timothy 2:8-13 (NRSV)

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

Last Saturday night (a week ago,) Pastor Gene and I attended worship with my brother and sister-in-law and Mom. We worshiped with about 2500 other people at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines. 2500 people! And that's only one of 4 services over the weekend.

At first I thought, "this place will never fill up." And then it did.

And even though I was one of 2500 (only knew 4 people in the room!) I was part of a service of all of us worshipping God!

The message subject matter was Jonah – a "whale of a tale" and Pastor Mike reminded us that God's call on our lives can't be ignored – even if we try!

Gene and I look to other preachers, wherever we are, to give US a message from God's Word. Pastors need feeding too – gasp!

When we can find them on all our channels, we watch reruns of Billy Graham crusades – "the classics" they call 'em – on Saturday nights. For me, it's a good way to get my head on straight to go HEAD ON into Sunday morning.

Earlier this summer, Billy Graham's Evangelistic Association sent me a series of emails that looked at popular hymns from Graham's crusades. At the time, I was preparing the "Stained Glass Stories" series but sure felt the nudge that *THIS* could be another enriching series – not just to preach but to be fed with...and again, it was a sure thing. We can't ignore God's nudges – even if we try.

As you know, Gretchen does a great job of sharing a hymn story in our newsletter. I'm sure she's done this favorite – "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and we'll be singing it in a few minutes.

So, to give you the details and credit to the Graham Association. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is not an old hymn. It was written by Thomas Chisholm who was born in Kentucky. Like Billy Graham, he spent much of his boyhood on a farm. He wrote poetry that he shared with friends, including the poem that became this hymn. Chisholm sent it to a friend who put the words to music and the completed work was published in 1923, but didn't gain popularity until the 1950s when George Beverly Shea began singing it at Billy Graham Crusades.

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not,
Thy compassions they fail not.
As Thou hast been Thou forever will be.*

Thomas Chisholm was 27 years old when he wrote this hymn. He was a sickly young man. And his favorite Scripture passage was from Lamentations. God's word says this:

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23 KJV

Too often we get misled into thinking that faithfulness is the opposite of freedom; that if we are faithful to something or someone we're tied down. So we flit around and almost everything is disposable – from paper plates to relationships.

But, PRAISE GOD, God *freely* chooses to be faithful to ALL people! John Wesley, UM's founder, chided his contemporaries who were preaching that God could treat anyone as disposable. Wesley believed – and I pray you're in agreement – that God is consistent, never moody *and though God hears them all*, is above every news report put out about us.

Mr. Chisholm had plenty of reasons to be discouraged throughout his years of poor health. And yet, this song, “Great is Thy Faithfulness” is a testament to the way God carried him—and carries *us*—through life’s hard places.

‘Cause we’ve all experienced disappointment; some of us more deeply and drastically than others.

That disappointment can put a worm in our heads that grows into doubt...doubt that God’s affection has left us...or we get angry (isn’t that disappointment on steroids?) because “things” aren’t the way they’re supposed to be.

When is God going to step in and make *everything* right again?

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness” is a reminder: WE aren’t forgotten.

God is consistent.

God provides “*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.*”

“Time after time,” Billy Graham once said, “*the Bible turns our attention to God’s faithfulness and the supernatural life working in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.*”

The word FAITHFUL is an adjective meaning: *steadfast in affection and allegiance; loyal*

Take a look at YOUR Bible when you get home, if you don’t have it with you now. There are MANY references about God’s faithfulness throughout Scripture – beginning to end.

Here’s a few spots you may want to stop and rest as you read and see that God’s faithfulness covers a gamut of topics where “things” aren’t right.

- In Genesis Abraham and Sarah didn’t have an heir. And they were old! NOT only did God provide a son to them, but multiplied their descendants as numerous “as the sand that is on the seashore” it says. (Genesis 22:17)
- God protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego— remember them from the book of Daniel? (Daniel 3:8-30) When these three God-fearing men were thrown in a fiery furnace for not worshiping an idol set up by the king,

(talk about things not being right!) they walked out without even a single on their clothes.

- And of course, God's faithfulness is most apparent when Jesus was sent to be the Savior of the world, to rescue us from sin – the very opposite of freedom! Jesus Christ came to mend the barrier that was between us and God (John 3:16). We will remember and humbly celebrate THAT next week on World Communion Sunday.

There are many more references including, of course, the one from Lamentations that Mr. Chisholm used. I found 21 references. How many will you find?

But, let's be honest.

God's **constant** loyalty can slip past our radar and go completely unnoticed.

Too often, we aren't paying attention, are we?

God's faithfulness isn't always expressed in big, saved-from-the-furnace displays.

Dear Ones, when we're caught up in our emotional, inward focus, we miss the many, little ways God stays true. Faithful.

We're in this for life! Not just these flesh and blood years, but also for our eternal lives!

Wesley said we have "degrees" of faith as we grow to learn more and more (AND MORE) about God's love for us.

Author Greg Scheer once said of today's focus song:

"The hymn reminds us that God doesn't only work in dramatic or miraculous ways, but also in simple, everyday ways. It also reminds us that Jesus has never failed us in the past, so we have no reason to doubt his faithfulness in the future."

The highest degree of faith we can get to is accepting - hear that - ACCEPTING the assurance of God's love – and then returning that love!

Whether we're facing disappointment about a job, our spouse or our kids, a test result, a self-imposed failure, or some other big letdown, we can't allow that to leave us jaded or cynical toward God.

Sometimes those difficult situations can cloud the blessings in our lives.

**Can't see 'em yet, BUT over and over, God pulls through.

**Might not be the way you think God should, but in God's faithful kind of way.

Think about the word, "faithfulness."

It means that God pulls through.

God is loyal.

God is always here for us.

God hears us, sees us and loves us unconditionally.

It says in Isaiah (49:23) that those who hope in God *"will not be disappointed."*

But wait, you might say; of course God disappoints.

That situation or that person in our lives – that "thing" that isn't working out to OUR satisfaction. We shout, "I had this ONE thing, God, just this one thing! And You, God, aren't answering me. You, God, aren't giving me a break."

Listen, it's not God's job to do what we want anyway.

And that's good.

Isaiah also wrote God's message this way:

"So are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Dear Ones, God has our best interests at heart, and God wants us to live fulfilling lives (John 10:10).

When we focus outwardly to trust God's faithfulness, our hope starts to outweigh our disappointment.

And, when we remember Jesus Christ, as Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter – the verses David read for us earlier, we have strength for hardships and disappointments. The verses concluded with an early Christian hymn – interesting, huh, that echo the perseverance we are called to in our Christian living and our own ministries. Just like Jonah – we aren't able to escape that call on our lives, which is to grow in degrees as Wesley said, in love with God.

This growth is from death to life – life forever in the presence of OUR faithful God. Nothing can separate us from God's faithfulness. Nothing.

*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me.*