

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Father's Day Sunday

June 15, 2008

“Who Holds the Rope?”

Trust God who Holds your Life in His Hands

Isaiah 40:1-3, 8, 25-31

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God says, “Comfort, O comfort My people.” (Isaiah 40:1)

There are times in every person's life when comfort is needed. Comfort means acceptance—not judgment,
caring—not keeping score,
understanding—not criticizing,
appreciation—not disapproval.

God tells us there is a time to comfort God's people, to speak kindly to His people and assure them that their iniquity has been removed; and they have received forgiveness and acceptance from the Lord their God.

I am sure there have been times in your life, as there have been in mine, that words of encouragement were just what I needed to hear. When I heard those words of comfort, my faith in God was strengthened.

One of the truths of the Christian understanding of God, which Jesus demonstrated for us, is that God loves us first even before we consciously decided to believe in God. God offers to comfort us from the wounds we have received from the world even before we have done anything to earn or deserve His love.

The rejection we have experienced from a family member, neighbor, or friend can leave a very heavy burden on one's heart. Our God says, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

We need to learn to accept the genuine comfort that God offers to us because of His everlasting love that is not dependent upon our performance of certain rites of passage, only the openness of our heart to believe in Him. There are times we need to have ears to hear God saying, “I love you just as you are. Come follow me more closely in the days ahead.”

Often this word of comfort and acceptance is not clearly heard. Some people continue to live in guilt and are afraid of a God of judgment. They know they cannot ever be perfect and always do exactly what they think God expects them to do. Therefore, they live in guilt and fear of God. When I was a student training for the ministry, as part of my training, I spent six months in a mental hospital in Massachusetts. I asked the head nurse on one of the units to which I was assigned why there were so many of the patients of a certain denomination. I

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knew she herself was also a member of that denomination so I thought it all right to ask her.

She said, “It’s because they can’t handle always feeling guilty. They cannot free themselves from being afraid of what God is going to do to them because they feel guilty of not being perfect.”

I believe we are born to do our best and the God of love shown us by Christ will take care of the rest.

In the Old Testament, God tells Isaiah to get up on a high mountain and say to His people: “Look, see, focus your lives on the one true God. Do not be distracted by other spiritualisms and religions. Be a bearer of lasting Good News!” (From Isaiah 40:9)

Our Congregational Church of the Messiah is set on a hill and yet the *highest* thing people passing by see is not a cross nor even the Mayflower ship which shows our Pilgrim for-bearers’ total reliance and trust in the power and grace of God. The highest thing on our property is a cell phone tower relaying wireless phone messages for a commercial company. I am sure that same cell phone network also can send messages of God’s Good News. I wonder if it is being used that way even as we are here worshipping.

In our lives as with our church property, we need to hear what Isaiah wrote, and lift our voice and say to everyone: “God is alive and well here in our city. God is here today.”

We have the opportunity to follow others examples to create a new Messiah Community Garden, to plant and grow food and flowers in place of ivy. The next few weeks is a time for preparation, gathering information, exploring possibilities that might work for us so that we as a church open a new way of expressing both the power and the tenderness of God’s eternal love.

Isaiah 40 tells each person to help his neighbor to be strong. Everyone encourages everyone else. Together they draw closer to God. Each person expresses God’s acceptance of himself or herself as other people are accepted on an equal basis.

In our church family at Messiah, we share both happy times and difficult ones. We struggle to find ways that bring healing and encouragement. Healthy growth includes not just comfort but also the challenging of one another to stretch out a little beyond our comfort zone. Going beyond tradition and what we know includes choosing to risk expressing our faith to others. We never know to whom God will give us the opportunity to speak. And coming the other way, we do not decide whom God will choose to use to speak to us.

Speaking to our friends and to others is one way God reaches other persons through us. When we are open to God’s leading, amazingly good words are spoken which bring comfort, guidance and encouragement.

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God may surprise you with increased patience just when you were about to blow your top; or you may find yourself doing some unexpected random act of kindness beyond your usual polite behavior.

God can increase your strength when your world comes crashing down on you and raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of God's hand. (From Isaiah 40:31)

God is not through with creation. He is continually expressing His compassion and love for us.

When we take a good look around us, many things vie for our confidence. Some people believe that scientists will one day be able to answer all the fundamental questions of life, therefore there is no need to believe in a God who created the world and universe.

Eight years ago on June 27, *The New York Times*' headline announced in bold type, "Genetic Code of Human Life is Cracked by Scientists." The front page article went on to explain, "Apparently there are 3 billion base pairs of the intertwining double helix of DNA that make up the set of chromosomes in our cells, which have now been sequenced."

The article goes further to explain: "By ordering the base units, scientists hope to locate the genes and determine their functions."

Further down in the article, however, the writers admit, "The human genome exults in contradictions..." Scientists know that the bulk of their work in deciphering that sequence has yet to be done.

Science has led us to answer many questions, but as one scientist stated, "We've got another century of work ahead of us to figure out how all these things relate to each other."

Should we compare the knowledge of modern science, what has been learned about creating life in a test tube with

how people can live in peace together with the wisdom of Almighty God?

Would you compare the power of guns and tanks or laser beams with
the God who created the universe,

Or would you compare the promises of political figures with
the promises of Eternal God?

Just because mankind has survived for a few thousand years does not give me confidence that going in the direction we seem to be going, we will just automatically survive whatever else is going to happen. More humans were killed in violence in the last 100 years than in all recorded history before 1908.

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Would you put your trust in the great worldwide economy? In stock or bonds that one day will rise and the next may fall?

Perhaps you choose to you depend on our own intelligence and strength to figure everything out on your own and to accomplish all you need to decide without even asking or expecting any connection with God's grace and strength to help you.

I stand here in the tradition of the Prophet Isaiah to proclaim the promise of a God whose power is greater than anything on this earth and whose love and ability to comfort are forever on our side.

“Those who wait for the Lord
Will renew their strength
They will mount up with wings like eagles;
they will run and not get tired;
they will walk and not grow weary.” (Isaiah 40:31)

We gather here to worship today, Father's Day 2008, as the Lord's Free People. We are in the early years of the 21st century. This could be the last 100 years in human history. There are enough nuclear bombs and weapons now in existence to destroy the entire earth, as we know it.

Or we could be living into some of the most exciting, dynamic years as humanity begins to learn that our best years are yet ahead of us, years of peace and working together, years of respecting differences and being responsible for meeting vital human needs wherever they are.

Dr. Arthur Rouner, Jr., Congregational minister, said in his quarterly Newsletter, “In so many ways it is up to us to do what we can – where we can – and while we can.”

(The Journey Out, Quarterly Newsletter, June 2000)

The facts keep coming in. It is easy to put our trust in things that are popular and are easy to see with our eyes. It is harder to put our trust in what we cannot see or touch.

The purpose of this Father's Day sermon is to encourage you to renew your conviction to trust your life to our heavenly Father instead of in science or temporary things including your own strength to always make the right choice for yourself.

I close with a story about orchids. Orchids are exceptional plants for not only their beauty and gracefulness or the amazing varieties, which often are found in the rain forests of the South Pacific. At one point, orchids were quite the rage in Europe. Boatloads of bulbs were shipped back from exotic islands for sale to the devotees in France, England and Italy.

Jack McArdle, avid orchid fan, tells the story of two botanists who discovered a flower of

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great rarity and beauty. They had been searching all day and seen only ordinary plants. This one was exceptional, and they just *had* to obtain it. The only problem was that the flower lay in a dangerous ravine accessible only by means of lowering someone down on a rope.

They had a rope, but who would go down? They settled on the capable, young native man who was their guide and asked him to go down the rope and get this plant for them.

“Just a minute,” he said, “I’ll be right back.” And he disappeared back up the path away from the cliff.

Soon, he returned accompanied by an older man.

Approaching one of the botanists, he said, “I will go over the cliff and get that flower for you if this man holds the rope. He is my father.” (*Preaching Annual*, 1999 p. 237)

“...The Everlasting God is the Lord,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not become weary or tired.
And His understanding is beyond human knowledge.
He gives strength to the weary,
And to the one who lacks might God increases his power.”
(Isaiah 40:28-29)

Those who trust their lives to our heavenly Father know complete comfort and peace.

Amen.