

# Congregational Church of the Messiah

Fourth Sunday after Easter

May 3, 2009

## **Anchors of Faith**

Acts 27:27-29

“Fearing they might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.” (Acts 27:29)

Dr. David L. Gray

Last Tuesday the *Los Angeles Times* in its section headlined THE NATION had a lead article titled “Why many Americans change faiths.” The subheading said, “A survey by the Pew Forum finds that people drift from childhood traditions or switch to a religious affiliation they like more.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes it feels as if our lives are drifting with not enough wind to get us where God wants us to go, or too much activity topples our best resolve to follow patiently our Lord in decisions and priorities.

Which way is our society going now? Is it headed for rocks or new lands of opportunity? Perhaps it is sailing toward a safe harbor to take on needed supplies for a longer journey.

The CEO of a large magazine publishing corporation was asked, “Why is the media publishing so many articles about religion and faith these days?” He replied: “The media are simply responding to what interests them and their audience which is the trend of spirituality.” He continued, “The interest relates to what we call the “Anchoring Trend.” “Anchoring” is a new trend, and it is enormous. It’s everything from wearing a little angel to burning incense to doing yoga...People are searching for community, not just a church.” They are looking for anchors in their lives.

This morning, I suggest Four Anchors of Faith to deepen our trust in God’s power, so we will act with God’s love, reach out to others, and respond with joy to God’s presence in our lives.

*The first anchor is deepening our trust in God’s power.*

God’s love is powerful enough to overcome whatever is causing you to fall. He can help you. God’s goodness is more powerful than human cruelty and evil intentions. Remember Jesus was resurrected from the dead into life everlasting. God wants the best for each of us. Although you might think that God’s attention is somewhere else when you need Him most, our awareness of His Spirit is always within us and can sustain us through the crisis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Helfand, Duke. Study Delves into Why Americans Change Religions. *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 28, 2008: A12.

## **Anchors of Faith**

In Paul's case, the ship was at a critical point. The sailors had discovered that they were being driven closer and closer to land. The depth of the water was getting shallower every time they measured it. Already they had thrown the cargo overboard, the tackle and everything but the food. After Paul told them to eat, they threw the remaining wheat overboard to try to lighten the ship being pushed by the strong winds and pounded by towering waves. No one had slept or eaten for fourteen days and nights. How cold and dark it must have been! There was good reason to fear for their lives. That was when Paul, with total trust in God's power, stood up and told his 276 shipmates that no one would die if they stayed with the ship. Paul completely trusted God. They should also.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "All that I have seen readies me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

The first anchor is trust in God.

*The second anchor is action.* If we really trust God, then we need to act and talk as though we do.

There is time for discussion and debate. There is time to reason with one another and have different viewpoints presented and battered around with arguments on behalf of one opinion or another. There is time for researching previous positions held by scholars and individuals. There is a time for searching for the perfect answer to a situation, which probably will change several times while considering alternatives.

However, there is also a time to stop searching and make a decision that leads to appropriate action, an action that God can bless. For everything, there is a time and season. There is a time to give yourself to a single direction and trust that God will bless your best efforts to follow His will.

On the ship in crisis, some of the sailors acted out of panic. They tried to save their lives by letting down a lifeboat on the pretense of setting out one of the anchors, planning an escape, and leaving everyone else on board.

But the centurion listened to Paul and prevented the sailors from leaving the ship. Instead, the centurion had the cords holding the lifeboat cut away so no one could use it. He believed Paul and took action so everyone would stay together on the ship.

The sailors fearing they might run aground somewhere on the rocks cast four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. (Acts 27:29)

There are times when we need to pray for light so we can see in which direction to go. Especially when it is dark, when we feel cold and afraid of what will happen to us next, then it is high time to pray for daylight, for God's light to shine on our minds and hearts so we can see more clearly the decision we should make,

the action we should take,  
the way we should go.

## **Anchors of Faith**

Acting with God's love showing us the way, we need not fear, for all things are possible for those who love the Lord.

Therefore, the second anchor is action.

*The third anchor is reaching out to others with respect in friendship, in service, and in support.*

Who is our neighbor that we are to love as we love ourselves? He or she is that person who is in need.

Paul did not discriminate which persons on that ship would be saved. As long as they stayed with the ship, they would not die. Later, when the ship did end up wrecked on a sandbar close to shore, those who could swim swam for the beach. Those who could not swim grabbed hold of a plank or anything that would float. All 276 men arrived safely on shore.

The third anchor of faith is reaching out to others.

This reaching out is most effective when done from an inner sense of God's presence. We are members one of another and all together are part of the body of Christ. As we stick together, as we work together, as we encourage one another, we find increased faith and ability to reach out to others with God's love.

I believe one reason Jesus gathered a group of twelve men around Him was to be able to pass on more of who He was to them. They learned by hearing and seeing, by following Jesus and seeing how He handled all kinds of situations.

Opportunities to share are often unexpected.

Yesterday afternoon four of us from Messiah drove out to see the Ramona Pageant in Hemet. Climbing the concrete steps in the outdoor amphitheater, we came to our row only to find a woman comfortably sitting in the first of the four seats for which we had tickets. She insisted that it was her seat. Showing her our tickets made no difference. I found an attendant who came and looked at her ticket and ours and tried also to explain to the woman that she was in the wrong row. The woman became belligerent with the attendant declaring that another attendant had told her where she was seated was her seat, and she was not moving.

After the second attendant, who had seated the woman came and explained her seat truly was in the next row back, the woman finally in a huff gathered her things and moved back one row muttering and fuming as we proceeded to sit where she had been sitting. Before the second attendant left, she defiantly took her ticket, tore it in half and threw it down in front of the attendant.

The wonderful outdoor atmosphere had changed to one of confrontation and hostility. Now people in seats and aisles around us were noticing her loud voice and angry tone of disgust as she moved back one row. Their smiles and remarks did nothing to calm the woman who was the brunt of their jokes.

## **Anchors of Faith**

It was not going to be a happy time for any of us without some action to change the ugliness and anger we felt from her. As we began to share snacks we had brought, I turned around, held out an ice tea to her, and asked if she would like it. She hesitated and then reached out and took it saying, “Thank you.”

The thaw had occurred. The anger was gone. Now we could all enjoy being there together.

In some other situation, God may use you to create peace where it is needed: perhaps in a traffic jam, perhaps in an extra slow line in the store, anywhere. You may be the one through whom God can touch someone else with His love.

It is hard to be filled with God’s love and not want to share that love with others. In fact, one aspect of God’s love is understanding us, accepting us and forgiving us our debts.

Another part of it is our forgiving those who are in debt to us. Through Jesus’ acceptance of us, we learn of God’s total unmerited gift of grace. God reaches out to us through Jesus Christ, who opens for us that amazing gift of unending love so we can reach out to others with that same gift of grace.

The anchors of trust, action, and reaching out with God’s love are complemented by *the fourth anchor of inner peace and joy*.

When the tides of life go out, friends seem to forget us; health begins to be undependable; and economic issues fester. It is a good time to deepen our trust, act in faith, and reach out to others with the confidence, which comes from inner peace and joy.

Our future depends upon the embracing of the anchors of faith, making them a part of our lives. Because of that inner acceptance of trust in God, faithful action, and reaching out to others, our lives become a reflection of God’s great love and care.

Used wisely, those anchors of faith will prevent us from being shipwrecked on the rocks of life, or pounded into the ground by situations often beyond our control. Anchors of faith can hold us securely to the Presence of God within us, the Spirit of the Eternal even in the midst of the temporary.

Sailing through life, we experience all kinds of weather. Let us be wise as well as courageous during difficult times, steadfast and creative during good times and filled with trust in God’s power, love and joy at all times.

Amen.