

Wesley United Methodist Church

January 28, 2018

“Defeating Discouragement.”

Mark 1:21-28

Estate Sales are interesting to me. I frequent them very often and I am always fascinated by the stuff that people kept over the years. We see familiar faces at the sales who usually look for a bargain they can't do without. Along comes a stranger who is looking for specific stuff, buys it and takes it home to clutter up his place and is perfectly happy about it.

Satan once had a yard sale. He thought he'd get rid of his old tools that were cluttering up his house. There was gossip, slander, adultery, lying, greed, power-hunger, and lust laid out on the tables. Interested buyers were perusing the tables looking for a good buy. One customer, however, strolled way back in the garage and found on a shelf a very shiny tool. It looked well cared for. He brought it out to Satan and asked if it was for sale. “Oh, no!” Satan answered. “This is my tool. Without it I couldn't wreck the world! It's my secret weapon!” “But what is it?” the customer asked. “It's the tool of discouragement,” the devil said.

Nothing takes the life right out of you more than discouragement. A discouraged spirit is a powerless spirit. It's an awful feeling—it feels like the wind has been knocked out of your soul.

I wonder if that is how the man possessed by an evil spirit felt when he met Jesus. He was so discouraged that he was too blind to see that Jesus wanted to heal him of his demons. The gospel of Mark states that Jesus told the man to be quiet and then ordered the evil spirit to come out of him. If we could just quiet the demons within us that bring discouragement that easily. Sometimes that's hard to do.

She lost her job at the agency three years ago. This tough economy has made it difficult for her to find a job. She has managed to make ends meet waiting on tables. She often cried herself to sleep at night thinking that three years ago she had a nice office. Now, she has a sore back from cleaning tables. She doesn't know how much longer she can do it. That's discouragement.

They were happily married for twenty years, or so he thought. He came home one day and she was gone. There was a note on the kitchen table that read, “I don't want to be married to you anymore.” It took his breath away. He can't wrap his mind around it. He hasn't slept in weeks. This is encouragement. That's discouragement.

She loved where she used to live. She had lots of friends and a great school. But Daddy needed to find work elsewhere. So they moved far away. Different school. Different neighborhood. Different culture. They make fun of her accent at school. She can't find anyone to sit with at lunch, so she eats her lunch alone on a hard bench outside. She hides her tears as people walk by. That's discouragement.

Discouragement is an awful thing. Life pulls the rug right out from under you, and you have nothing to hold on to. Your confidence is shattered. A sense of well-being is a distant memory. Your motivation has evaporated. Have you ever felt that way? If you have, do you remember how you got over it? Some people never do get over it. A traumatizing event happens, discouragement sets in, and they are never the same.

Everyday is a battle with discouragement. They can't seem to get over what happened to them. In every circumstance, they are a victim. In every relationship, they are a victim. In every conflict, they are a victim. Do you know anyone like that? Discouragement is a strong force.

We've all been discouraged. We know how debilitating it can be. I've always wondered why some people seem to bounce back from it while others wallow in it forever. I know people who have gone through unspeakable things throughout their lives and they just keep on going and never miss a beat. I know others who experience one set-back in life and they live in the pit the rest of their lives.

I've always been curious as to what makes that difference. Why do some people get over discouragement and disappointment and others don't. What's the difference? Genetics? Upbringing? Mental attitude? Religion? A change in lifestyle?

The Bible has a lot of wisdom. It probably would not be a bad idea to consult the Bible on an issue like discouragement. And you know who I think would be a good person to ask about how to get over discouragement? Isaiah. Isaiah was very wise and he knew about discouragement. The prophet wept over the suffering of Israel. Isaiah saw the coming of the Babylonian army and watched as they destroyed Jerusalem. The prophet, along with the rest of God's people, was held captive and he watched as his nation was ruined. His heart sank as he watched God's people become discouraged and bitter. He was called to encourage the people of God.

Yeah, I think Isaiah would be a good person to seek advice from about discouragement. I believe the wisdom he gave to the beat-up nation of Israel is good enough for us today:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:28-31)

That sounds more like it, doesn't it? That's what we need—run and not be weary, to walk and not faint—to soar like an eagle. Have you ever seen an eagle fly? It's one of the most beautiful sights in the entire world! The eagle spreads his wings, exerting very little effort, allowing the wind to carry it along as it climbs higher in the sky. Wouldn't it be great to live that way? I know many people who would love to live life that way. I know people in the pit who would love to soar like an eagle.

I'm glad Isaiah mentions walking and not fainting. So much of life is about walking, going one step at a time. That's true, day after day, one little thing after another; walking one step at a time. Yet, Isaiah says we can have strength that empowers us day after day.

That sounds great, doesn't it? How do we get it? Well, it's right in the text. The key is right under our nose. Anyone who seeks to live by their own power will eventually break down. Isaiah puts it this way, “Even youths will faint and be weary...” Count on it. No matter how young you are, how self-sufficient you may be, or how independent you may feel, if you try to live your life on your own power, you will break down. You will fail. You will give out. You will be discouraged over and over again.

This is a truth so many of us resist. We don't want to be told that we can't stand on our own feet. We don't want to be told that we can't handle life on our own. We don't want to be told that we're vulnerable.

It's only when we stop resisting the truth of God, can we open ourselves to the power over discouragement. God has that power and he can give that power. Isaiah tells us that God gives power not to those who think they are who think they are strong, not to those who think they can handle life on their own, not to those who are proud of their own self-sufficiency. Isaiah says God gives power to the weak, the vulnerable, the open, the powerless, the willing, those who are giving their life to him.

If you are discouraged today, the worst thing you can do is to try to overcome by yourself. The best thing you can do is what Isaiah directs us to do, “Wait for the Lord.” Now this is not passive, lazy waiting. It is hopeful waiting, purposeful waiting. It is a waiting that knows in God's good time God will provide God's good answer.

Just as Jesus healed the discouraged man of his demon, so he can heal us of ours. Let's exchange our weakness for God's strength.