

Comfort

The movie 1917 just came out. Has anyone seen it. For those who have not it is about soldiers in WWI who need to get a message to American troops to back off a planned attack because there is a trap waiting for them. What's interesting is that the whole movie is not a bunch of plots and subplots and different perspectives. Rather it is the journey of a couple soldiers on their way to deliver this message - that's it. And it highlights many things. Like how war has changed. During World War I there was trench warfare, and if you want to see or imagine the intricate use of trenches you have the museum at Cantigny and now also this movie. But besides the journey and trench warfare where this movie excels is reminding people just how brutal, ugly, and intense war really is. Whether it be what they find in the trenches or being covered with rocks - war brings the worst parts of life. And it's a reminder to civilians like myself those who serve our country or have served deserve our appreciation. It's also a reminder and here is the first take away. *Some of the greatest acts are also the hardest.*

Let me riff on that thought for just a bit. Tomorrow is MLK day some kids have off of school. How many of us haven't been inspired by one of the greatest speeches the I have a dream speech. "I have a dream that my four little children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." And Martin Luther King Jr's dream of equality, through marches, speeches and demonstrations came at a significant cost. He was constantly under threat, and his life was ultimately taken from him. But this idea of the greatest and hardest correlates with so much in life. It's for every Mom in labor giving birth. It's for student cramming more information to an already full brain to ace the test. It's for the worker who sees the problem and fights for the solution - though it takes something from them to deal with that child, that client, that request.

You know it is interesting when it comes to work I believe at one time or another every profession uses this phrase. "If it were easy, everyone would do it." And so the mechanic grabs the wrench and does a wonder and says start it up. So the attorney takes the case, and the computer whiz writes the code. All the while they know it's hard, it's brutal, it's a grind to make it turn out good. That many times in work at life to do our very best at something - it takes nothing less than giving it all we got. with Scotty from Star Trek.

Well welcome once again to Amazing Love. We are in the series called chasing carrots. And today we are considering the carrot of comfort. And one of the problems with setting out to be comfortable. *The carrot of comfort may keep you from the greatness.* Now we love to look at things through a spiritual lens, and we love if you're watching or here today and not a Christian. But if you are in Christ, if you believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then he has called you to be great. He said that you and I are to be the light of the world. He said if you want to be great here it is: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal 5:22-23) And to be kind to all, to be faithful to be self-controlled is great, but won't happen if all you want is comfort.

And we see this in the life of another man who was truly great named Paul. There should be an apostle Paul day for all he did. He was the greatest missionary of all time, reaching the most people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was chosen by God to do this great work. But in the words he shares with us he let's us know what greatness takes. He is writing to Christians in the town of Corinth, about his experience and what he is feeling to be a missionary. He knows he carries the most precious jewel of the Gospel, but he also knows his limitations and weakness as a person. So he writes. Turn to your neighbor and say, "You have the right to be weary"

What has been one of your best years of life? If we go back when I was a Sophomore in High School life was good. In JV football I played both ways Defensive End and Offensive End. And I will never forget the game when they put me further in the line as guard. I was 135 lineman. I lived by the motto it isn't the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog. And the reason I remember this game in particular is that it was brutal. It took everything I had to push back those who were much bigger than me. I remember my coach thanking me and yet also empathizing with the struggle after the game - we did win. And I consider in a team you do what is necessary. And though it was comfortable for me it was helpful and a service to the team, and the guy who was sick. And I tell you this story because I do believe this: *There is a correlation between your discomfort and degree of service.*

That's true of so many stations in life, team, work. Consider being a parent. I saw this picture on Facebook. "Being a parent is like jumping out a plane with a whole bunch of people who don't know how to open their chutes. So you fly around doing it for them...Then you hit the ground, but you don't die. You get up and cook dinner." Perhaps there are some parents that can relate to this. You know what it is to work, chauffeur, clean house, cook, help with homework, give reminders. And the stresses come at you like a 250 pound line man and you weigh 135.

Some may know that if you are in Christ he has called us to be servants. And the reality is serving well doesn't usually fit convenience, schedules, or preference. Paul is one of those lead servants. And look at what he calls out. "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." (11-12) To the degree I die is in a similar way to the degree you live. Another way of looking at this is saying my degree of discomfort correlates to your degree of benefit. Paul could say I made tents in some places, had to flee for my life in other places, was in prison, stoned and flogged - so that you could know Christ. So I could continue in the calling Jesus had for my life.

What does this all mean? It means if you came in weary today, if you came in emotionally or physically depleted for all the ways you have been serving. *Worn out doesn't mean you're doing it wrong* - it may be evidence you are doing it exactly right. War-torn and weary is how servants may feel as they max out their service for the sake of God and others. It's what a Christian song Worn says, "I'm Tired I'm worn My heart is heavy From the work it takes To keep on breathing." In fact one of my favorite things to say to people as I see them in the morning and they say they are tired. You have the right to be tired. Yep I get it. Just glad to see you.

And consider with me the life of our Savior, our Leader, our Example Jesus. How comfortable was his existence here on earth? Each day was a battle. We covered how he was born and people wanted to kill him. His family didn't believe, the disciples were dumb, the Pharisees were jealous, and the devil was out to get him. He served, loved, prayed, did miracles and preached sermons. He reach out to children, prostitutes, tax collectors, and the elite of society like Pontius Pilate. And sometimes he got so worn out - he had to be by himself with the Father. In fact one of my favorite accounts is when worn out caught up to him on a boat. "Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mk 4:38) Why is this my favorite? You know what two conditions are really hard to sleep through. 1) Children screaming 2) Water splashed on you. If you can sleep through that you're amazing. What's happening. The disciples some of who are fisherman are in a storm so bad they think they are going to die - running around screaming like children. AHH. This is not a yacht with private cabin, this is most likely an open boat get tossed back and forth water splashing on Jesus. And Jesus is sleeping. How worn do you have to be for that!

But the temptation when worn is to give up and give in. Someone else can deal with this, someone else can do it. *I wonder today what is the noble or good calling or activity you are tempted to give up on?* Paul wrote this is what it feels like. *We are hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.* v.8-9 And who hasn't felt when life is pressing hard to do anything for release. When perplexed to decide whatever makes me happy. When persecuted to run from the fight, and when struck down to stay down and just stop. The truth is we do not fight as much as we could for the benefit of others.

But there is one who did. He wasn't just hard pressed, he was crushed. They took his very life from him. He was just perplexed he was in despair crying out if there is any other way, praying through drops of blood. Not just persecuted, but abandoned by his Father. Why have you forsaken me? He asked as the Father turned away. Not just struck down but killed. He breathed his last. And yet through this discomfort and the degree of which it was bad, a correlating degree of the benefit and good he won. For sticking in the fight and not backing down. He won peace, he won victory, he won release, and the right to comfort for all who believe. He reminds us today that no matter how many times you gave up and gave in - he fought and won for you. You and I are victorious because of the battle he won. And what this means? *You may not be comfortable, but you can be comforted.* (Pastor Prahl) Comfortable might never be the case for you. But comforted can always be the case through Jesus' cross.

But if serving God is like going to war. If it takes hard work to do significant acts. I consider a boxer in the ring. And I was just thinking that a lot of people have good rounds in them. Round 1. Wow great job. Round 2. Yes - still got it. Round 3. Alright. But what happens on Round 13 or 35? We fight and we give - like who is in our corner? And because of the fight it's good we live in a world of creature comforts.

So let me be clear this sermon does not need you need to throw out the memory foam mattress and sleep on nails. After a long day of serving who doesn't like good sleep. It doesn't mean you can't buy a car with heated seats or go on vacation filled with a lot of napping and lounging. Praise God that he allows us to live in an age when there are many things available for the recharge. Many creature comforts. And do you have a favorite? For me it's not just remote control I remember when you used to have to get up, but now voice control. I love that if you

want food, you can have delivered to your house so much more than pizza. Yes, This is not a sermon against heated seats, memory foam, and napping. It's just a reminder that these are not the final and ultimate pursuit. I believe we leverage these things for renewal. Creature comforts may be the means for an end, but not the end themselves. *Creature comforts are good for a recharge but make a lousy reason for living.* Because no matter how many naps you can still get tired, no matter how good the car is the traffic is still bad. With all the creature comforts available the fight is still fierce. And because God has greater purposes for you life.

Which is why I love who we have in our corner as we fight on for significant purpose. Better than the newest refreshing drink or memory foam mattress. We have God in our corner. And Paul spoke about a renewal that happens day by day by his grace. In fact earlier in the book he spoke about the God that stands in the corner. Consider, "The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles." (2 Cor 1:4) We have the God who never leaves or forsakes us. And he knows how to address our battle wounds. Are you facing loneliness that came from desertion or betrayal or hurt. He says I will never leave or forsake you. Are you facing frustration and wondering if it's worth it. He says you can give fully to the work of love - my work - and know it is not in vain. Do you need my presence more clearly. Every time you come to the table I offer you myself - my true body and blood in the Sacrament. He is the comforter, cry out to him if you need it. You may never be comfortable, but have the right to be comforted. Are you just weary and worn. Come let me lead you to green pastures and beside still waters. I know how to renew your strength and energy through the most ordinary and mundane - have a cookie and nap.

And maybe this a good sermon to hear because many people are wrestling with "How to live your best life?" You ever wonder? What does your best life look like. Now if you go on Instagram you can get some suggestions - based on the photos you will find that your best life is buying a new house, going on a dream vacation, or getting a new job. Best life might be being healthier physically or emotionally - and the world has many ideas on how to do it. I heard recently that you can give off the impression of your best life to a company if you send in your family photos, they send them back photoshopped with the Eiffel tower in the background, or on the beach, or on a mountain. You could fake others out about your best life. But could I weigh in on how to have the best life? I believe *The best life is a life that requires faith.*

Paul was living his best life. But it required faith to be able to trust God's plan and continue on with threat of death. In the Bible there is this chapter dedicated to those who lived life the very best. It's the heroes of faith chapter. It talks about Abraham who picked up and moved when God told him to do it, though he was going to a land he didn't know. It talks about Noah who built a massive ark on dry ground, being made fun of for it, but having faith in what God said. Talks about Moses who left life in an Egyptian palace to be treated as one of God's sons in the desert - knowing he was an Israelite. And the premise of the chapter of faith reminds us, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hb 11:1) A life of faith is looking to the future and saying we'll I don't have it yet, and I don't see it yet - but God will be with me. See a safe and comfortable life on earth is usually us having it all figured out with plans in place and a budget to boot. But a life of faith looks around and says - whoah I don't know what happens next, but I know who will be there to guide and bless. The innate nature of a life of faith is discomfort because of the unknown.

And what is God's purpose in our discomfort. I absolutely love the imagery he gives of us being jars of clay. All cracked and broken. With something incredible inside. It's a ridiculous notion too - it's kinda like putting a million dollars into a ziploc bags. But why does he do it? Well for one so that when people see us in grace he allows others to see our cracks, our flaws, our failures. So that no one is confused about what is truly precious. The God and the message of love we carry. If God has allowed you to walk close enough with another Christian to seek chinks in their armor but firm confidence in the God of love that is a blessing. *Our discomfort is there to remind us and others of God's strength.* For us we need God in our corner refreshing us, and for others they need to see shining through the cracks of our imperfect lives the true treasure of Jesus.

But there is another reason he allows discomfort. This past week I attended a funeral for my brother's mother in law. And it was beautiful. There were many conversations filled with tears and laughter. There was beautiful music as the kids are very talented. But there was also the pain and discomfort in saying good-bye. In knowing that a wonderful light for the Lord was no longer shining here on earth. In knowing how life changes without such a powerful presence around. And in a certain sense there is a part of me that thinks we should go to a funeral everyday because of the perspective it gives. And in the midst of the grief of that moment, and the clarity of faith in that moment. It reminded me *there is discomfort because we are not yet home.* And to the degree God let's us feel that - through the pain of saying good bye, or in other ways - is also a degree of his grace. Getting us off the hamster wheel - chasing the carrots of the world that seem to hold much but offer little. There is a day when comfortable and comforted culminates - but not until we have a day like Terri Herlich. Not until the day we see the Lord.

Until that day may he give us strength to live our best lives. To accept the hard. And to serve the Lord with all we got. Amen.