

Adventure Time
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
June 19, 2016

Psalm 22:19-28

- ¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
²² I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live for ever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

I just love what Joan Gray says: “When we start with a conviction about what God can do instead of focusing only on what we can do, church leadership becomes a spiritual adventure.” I mean, seriously, when was the last time you thought of any part of church as an adventure? I think the closest we have gotten recently is the way we view the summer

mission trips, the way we anticipate them. I suspect the beginning of Meals on Wheels and the beginning of The Caring Place felt that way once. I think the Master Classes probably felt that way. I have a feeling that there are others I haven't named. It's not that church **can't** feel like an adventure – it just seems to be more of a rarity than the norm.

Think about the last adventure **you** took. Saturday, our trivia team participated in a special Harry Potter-themed trivia event. We [not just me – really!] tend to be very competitive and so we strategized as we have done with all the other special events. We each claimed at least one book / movie to re-read / re-watch in order to brush up and have the details fresh in our minds. If you've not read the books or watched the movies, in short, they are about a boy and his two closest friends seeking to defeat a very specific kind of evil, embodied in Lord Voldemort to those bold enough to speak his name, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to all the rest. They gain knowledge and experience in order to do so in classes but especially in living in the world, putting to use what they learned and then learning from **that** experience. I *might* draw a companion to church attendance and lived faith.

Hermione Granger is the voice of reason in the trio and I think their friendship is summed up best with this quote: “Now, *if* you two don't mind, I'm going to bed before either of you come up with another clever idea to get us killed – or worse, expelled.” Ron Weasley says in response, after she's left, “She *needs* to sort out her priorities.”¹ I have been, and probably always will be, Hermione – careful, cautious, watchful, planning; cleverness will get me both through difficult things and out of them. Harry and Ron? Not so much any of those things. Hermione's approach is great for taking tests, for flying under the radar, for playing it safe, for solving problems on her own. And when Harry gets through a scrape without having done the same hard work she did, she is not just a little annoyed.

But for all Hermione's “rightness,” it is really someone who is like Harry who would join the psalmist in saying, “But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!” In the case of the Harry Potter books, it is magic upon which he relies, that upon which he calls, that in which he puts his trust. Perhaps somewhat disappointingly, we do not live in a world of magic. Of course, it may involve less instant gratification but I can say I

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ47glcxr0>

think we have the better deal, we, faith people, over magic people. I mean, even magic has no power over death! I think the glamour of the Harry Potter universe is that Harry, Ron, and even Hermione, lean on magic, and regularly. Us and God? Not nearly as much.

But what if? What if we looked at situations and wondered how God could help us in and through them? What if God were the first thing we thought of when we were faced with a challenge OR an opportunity? What if **God** was the force outside of us upon which we called? What if we focused on what God can do instead of focusing on what we can do? Gray suggests we would be agreeing to an adventure. Now the thing about actively participating in an adventure is that you agree to let the outcome unfold; in fact, you actively choose to be surprised by what happens. It is the “not-knowing” that sets apart an adventure. And that means I can only guess what the end or outcome of any adventure might be **and** I’m okay with that.

Of course, we can be on adventures not of our choosing – they’re still adventures, we still don’t know what the outcome will be, but we did **not** sign a waiver up front and we’re not particularly keen about any of the uncertainty. Those adventures we fight against, we struggle against, wanting to take control of the course. But the adventure always wins. C.S. Lewis once wrote, “The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one’s ‘own,’ or ‘real’ life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one’s real life – the life God is sending one day by day.”² It is this reminder I need daily. Whatever unfolds in a day is not because of the control I exercised or could not exercise; whatever unfolds was meant to unfold. My choice is to agree to the adventure or struggle against it, like a toddler being dressed in a coat while still inside on a winter’s day, flailing and wailing. One way or another I’m going to end up in the coat. I can flail and make myself even warmer, more uncomfortable, in the flailing, or I can stretch out my arms, let myself be zipped in, and then be guided outside where I am grateful for the coat.

The same is true for us as a church. We can choose to follow where God wants to lead us or we can fight it and become more and more uncomfortable. That is true for every

² <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/44447-the-great-thing-if-one-can-is-to-stop-regarding>

church in every time. And we have this choice each day, each month, each time we face a challenge or an opportunity, and that depends on how you look at it, too. We're really on an adventure either way, so which do we choose – to focus on what we can do or on what God can do?

Let us pray: Lord, zip us up and lead us out, we pray. Amen.