

Picture of Military Chaplains

I was reading a story about Lutheran pastors serving as Military Chaplains. Much of the work is listed under the phrase, Ministry of Presence. I had the privilege this week of pulling together 3 themes for you this morning. We have Elijah as part of our narrative lectionary. It is all Saint's Day. Also, next Sunday is Stewardship Sunday where we receive an offering of our time, talent and treasures. I was tasked to also speak a bit on Stewardship as we pray about our commitment to our Lord for next year. So Elijah, All Saints Day and Stewardship. I dare say all 3 of them have a connection to the presence of God. There was a famous philosopher, **Friedrich Nietzsche** who didn't believe in God and had this famous quote.

Here is a picture of him.

God is Dead

Friedrich Nietzsche

There is a counter quote to this line.

Nietzsche is Dead

God

Having the presence of God is connecting to a living God who matters in our lives. This is why we shout He is Risen! And you respond, He is Risen indeed.

Picture of Elijah

Elijah is being hunted down to be killed because he is a prophet for God. We read the following in 1 Kings 19:3-4

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

Elijah had reached the end of the line. He was tired, afraid, and worn out. He reached the end of the rope. Ministry can be very hard. He is at a faith crisis. The weight of the world is upon him. At this point he is ready to simply die.

I was at a congregation where I was ready to quit as a pastor. I was disillusioned. It was partly the churches fault and my fault. The church just wanted a caretaker. The pastor's role was to serve them. I on the other hand thought our calling was to be disciples in the world. I wanted a church that had a desire to make a difference in the world. So in the lowest of low, if someone would have offered me a job I would have taken it. Instead, I went to get some counseling. I discovered something about myself. First, I am a pioneer and pioneers have trouble with settlers. There is nothing wrong with settlers. Settlers like to settle and pioneers like to explore. I once asked someone how pioneers survive in settled churches. The person said, well, mostly they don't. What happens is they leave and start mission churches. Does that sound familiar? What I also discovered is that I needed to do two things. First I needed to reach out

I took two years exploring congregations that were on fire for the world. Secondly, I needed to reach in. I had to be very intentional about my walk with God. So even as I was in a bad place for me, I became very intentional about making sure I had time with God. For you see with God at your side, all things are good. God sends Elijah an angel to minister to him and redirects Elijah's ministry. Elijah is comforted by the presence of God which allows him to continue. There are points in our lives where we wonder if we can continue. We lose a job or suffer a personal tragedy. Losing loves ones causes the whole world to turn upside down. You wonder how you are going to make it.. Sometimes you have trouble even getting out of bed in the morning. Seeking the presence of God and holding on is about all you can do. Often that is just what you need.

For there is great comfort in the presence of God.

Now this joke as told back in the days when eating bran was the latest and greatest health fad. A husband and wife dies and goes to heaven. They marvel at the wonder and the beauty of it all. The husband turns to the wife and says, "I could have been here sooner, except you kept feeding me bran muffins"

On All Saints Sunday we honor our departed saints. It is a hard day for many because we are both sad and glad. Sad because of the memories. Glad because of where our loves ones are now with Jesus. At the time of Jesus the assumption was that God was only present with the rich and the successful. The Sermon on the Mount tips that whole thought on its head.

"Blessed are the pour in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God"

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"

To be blessed is knowing who holds us. It is less about the circumstances of this life and more about a life in the presence of God. This is one of the best benefits of being part of a Christian community. Now I recognize that we Americans are raised with our sense of independence. We are taught as the saying goes, then the going gets tough, the tough get going. Therefore too many of us keep all of our troubles to ourselves. We don't want to be a bother or a burden. So do you know what we do, we stuff it. We suffer in silence. Look around you. This is your family. This is a family that loves you. When we share our burdens, our burdens become lighter. Did you consider that a warm hug, a prayer, a heart lifting comment is the presence of God at work? For many of us, we are the angels the God uses to comfort those in the world.

For there is great comfort in the presence of God.

Lastly a word about Stewardship. We read the following in 2nd Corinthians,

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

A cheerful giver and being blessed in abundance. We think the abundance means we have more than enough turkey on the table. But if we take Matthew seriously, than blessings come from the presence of God in all things of life, good or bad. Can we ever thank God enough for the greatest blessing that of

the cross, the resurrection and Heaven? For be reminded we have an alive God not a dead God. For you see, Stewardship is trusting that as we give of ourselves, we trust that God will see us through. So pray, trust, give thanks knowing that the presence of God is forever. So we remember:

There is Great comfort in the Presence of God.