

Sermon: It Could Happen In 2020

Last Sunday we concluded a sermon series on the story of Noah and Ark and we saw how much that story speaks to where we find ourselves today in these uncertain times. We're still in the ark, really. Our boat hasn't landed on dry ground yet. The storm is still raging as we see the number of cases rising in most of the country. And we're worried and we're restless. But, there are some indications that the flood waters might just be receding. A couple of days ago, I saw Dr. Fauci in an interview saying that he's "cautiously optimistic" that by the end of this year or early next year, we may well have a vaccine for this virus.

I've been hearing so many people saying, "I can't wait till 2020's over." "2020 will be the year that never was." And I get that. But I'm not ready to put my life on hold yet. I still think that there's the possibility of finding some measure of happiness and peace of mind in 2020. The Bible's full of stories of people who found joy and peace, even in the midst - of the most terrible circumstances.

This got me to thinking about the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians is called "the Epistle of Joy". "Rejoice," Paul says. "And again, I say rejoice." It's one of the most joyful letters in the New Testament. And what's amazing about that is that it's written when Paul is in prison, in Rome. When he writes this, his future is uncertain. He doesn't know if he's going to live or die. A couple of times in his letter, Paul mentions his future prospects, he's preparing this little church in Philippi for whatever the outcome may be. But Paul says to them, don't worry about it, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Here's Paul, in the worst possible circumstances but he's happy and he has peace of mind.

Duke University did a study some years ago. They wanted to know what the key components are in people who have peace of mind, or happiness. They interviewed hundreds of people from all walks of life and what they learned was that money wasn't a factor, success wasn't a factor, power or popularity – it turned out that these things weren't indicators of peace of mind or joy.

But they did find 8 indicators that people with peace of mind and joy shared in common.

1. An absence of suspicion and resentment. They valued the worth and experiences of others so they weren't suspicious of others and valued their point of view. And they didn't hold grudges.
2. The ability to live in the present. They didn't live in the past. They didn't chew on old regrets or old mistakes.
3. They didn't waste time and money and effort on things they couldn't change.
4. They were involved in the world around them. Showing concern for others.
5. They didn't indulge in self-pity. They accepted the fact that nobody gets through this life without some sorrow and misfortune.

6. They exhibited the old-fashioned virtues—love, humor, compassion, loyalty, neighborliness, community and civic mindedness.

7. They weren't perfectionists. They accepted the fact that they weren't perfect, and that they made mistakes.

8. They believed in something bigger than themselves.

In this study, people who were egotistical and self-centered, blaming and self-pitying, scored the lowest in happiness and peace of mind. And the people who engaged the world in respectful, others-centered relationships, who exhibited a love of neighbor and service to others, were happier and had peace of mind.

If you've been watching the news, you may have had the chance to see a great example of these indicators of happiness and peace of mind Tom Moore from England. I first saw him on the news in early April.

Tom Moore was 99 years old then. England had shut down and was in social isolation. He lives in a village around 40 miles north of London. And maybe one of the reasons he's lived so long is that he has a daily regimen of exercise: he takes a walk around his yard (in England they call that their garden).

He's a WW2 veteran, a former officer in the British Army, so around town, people call him "Captain Tom." He served in India, the Burma Campaign, and Sumatra during the war. He's a man who shows all the hallmarks of the Greatest Generation

Just after the shut down, Tom Moore started seeing the news reports about health care workers in England. They didn't have enough protective equipment. Another thing that happened was that there was a rush on the stores as people hoarded food and essentials but the healthcare workers were at work and the stores were now empty and so their cupboards were bare.

So early in April, he came up with an idea to raise money for them. His 100th birthday was coming up on April 30th. And so he let some of the folk in his local village know that he'd be raising money for these health care workers by walking 100 laps around his garden before his 100th birthday. That meant 10 laps a day for 24 days. He had a modest target: he figured he could reach about 13 hundred dollars by doing this.

Well, the media caught wind of this, and cameras came and filmed him walking with his walker in his suit and tie (which is his daily attire). And it caught the imagination of the people of England. Money started coming in. When he was told that there were donations of over 6 million dollars so far, he said:

"When we started off with this exercise, we didn't anticipate we'd get anything near that sort of money. It's really amazing. All of them, from top to bottom, in the National Health Service, they deserve everything that we can possibly put in their place. They're all so brave. Because every

morning or every night they're putting themselves into harm's way, and I think you've got to give them full marks for that effort. We're a little bit like having a war at the moment. But the doctors and the nurses, they're all on the front line, and all of us behind, we've got to supply them and keep them going with everything that they need, so that they can do their jobs even better than they're doing now."

Money continued coming in and others were inspired by what he was doing. Somebody came out with a new recording of "You'll Never Walk Alone", and it went to number 1 in the pop charts with all the proceeds going to his charity. So that on his hundredth birthday, by the end of the day on April 30th, Tom Moore had raised more than \$39 million to support health workers through the contributions of over 1½ million people. On that day, his birthday was marked by the Royal Air Force and British Army doing flybys over his head.

The news this past Friday reported that Tom Moore was made a knight of the realm, now to be known by his official title as Captain Sir Tom Moore. And you could see him being made a knighted by Queen Elizabeth with a tap on his shoulder, using her father's sword in her first public appearance since the coronavirus outbreak.

And his response after this was simply: "I am absolutely overwhelmed. Never for one moment could I have imagined I would be awarded with such a great honor. I'd like to thank Her Majesty The Queen, the Prime Minister and the Great British public. I will remain at your service."

At your service. 2020's not over yet. We still have time to do so much good for others, to be of service to others. We still have time to make 2020 a year that we want to remember because it was the time we became, as a nation and as individuals, a little less focused on what we were going through and a little more focused on what others are going through. We could channel our energies, focus our prayers, live more in the present, look around us and respond with the good, old fashioned virtues—of love, humor, compassion, loyalty, neighborliness, and civic mindedness.

I think Paul would say to us, "Y'all think wearing a mask is hard? Why don't you try being a little bit more self-giving, like Jesus was self-giving. You want some peace of mind? Why don't you take on the mind of Christ? Actually, the way Paul said it was:

Don't do anything from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Don't confine yourselves to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,

he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.