

# Sermon Text for December 31, 2023

By Guest Speaker Marcia Andersen

## A FATHER'S LOVE

ABOUT 12 YEARS AGO OUR YOUNGEST DAUGHTER GOT MARRIED AND DANCED THE FATHER/DAUGHTER DANCE TO I LOVED HER FIRST. THE FIRST TIME I EVER HEARD THAT SONG WAS ON THE CAR RADIO ONE SATURDAY MORNING WHEN I WAS OUT GARAGE SALE-ING. I HAD TO PULL OVER TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, I STARTED CRYING SO HARD. IT SEEMED LIKE THE LYRICS HAD BEEN WRITTEN JUST FOR WHITNEY AND KEN. I COULD PICTURE THEM DANCING TO THIS ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE. THE LYRICS EVEN INCLUDED WHITNEY'S FRECKLES AND THEIR BEDTIME ROUTINE.

HOW COULD THAT BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WITH YOU, BE THAT SAME FRECKLE FACE KID THAT I KNEW- THE ONE THAT I READ ALL THOSE FAIRY TALES TO- AND TUCKED INTO BED ALL THOSE NIGHTS.

IT WAS BERENSTEIN BEAR BOOKS WITH KEN AND WHIT- BUT THE ENTIRE SONG PRETTY MUCH NAILED THEIR FATHER/DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP.

FROM THE FIRST BREATH SHE BREATHED  
WHEN SHE FIRST SMILED AT ME

I KNEW THE LOVE OF A FATHER RUNS DEEP  
AND I PRAYED THAT SHE'D FIND YOU ONE DAY  
BUT IT'S STILL HARD TO GIVE HER AWAY  
I LOVED HER FIRST

AND AS I WATCHED THEM DANCE THAT AUGUST EVENING I WAS BLOWN AWAY. NOT JUST BECAUSE I WAS WATCHING MY DREAM COME TRUE....BUT BECAUSE I HAD NO IDEA THAT KEN COULD DANCE! LATER I WOULD ASK HIM, "HONEY, WHY HAVE YOU NEVER DANCED LIKE THAT WITH ME?" AND HE ANSWERED, "BECAUSE YOU'VE NEVER LET ME LEAD" WELL, I COULD NOT ARGUE THAT ONE. GIVING UP CONTROL AND LETTING ANYONE ELSE LEAD HAS NEVER BEEN MY STRENGTH. SOMETIMES THAT INCLUDES GOD. TRUSTING GOD CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT- EVEN THOUGH HE HAS BEEN FAITHFUL FOR 66 YEARS OVER AND OVER. BUT WHETHER I TRUST HIM OR NOT DOES NOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT I CAN TRUST HIM.

NOW, I AM NO THEOLOGIAN. I DON'T KNOW A SINGLE WORD OF GREEK. THAT IS WHY FOR THIS SERMON I AM TAKING COURAGE FROM ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOVIE LINES. IN THE MOVIE 'RUDY' THE YOUNG NOTRE DAME FOOTBALL PLAYER GOES TO THE MATURE PRIEST FOR ADVICE. THE PRIEST SAYS "RUDY, I HAVE SERVED GOD AND STUDIED FOR MY ENTIRE LIFE, AND AFTER ALL THAT TIME THERE ARE JUST TWO THINGS THAT I KNOW FOR CERTAIN, ONE- THERE IS A GOD AND TWO- I'M NOT HIM  
WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THIS LINE IS THE SIMPLICITY AND I'M GOING TO RUIN THAT HERE BECAUSE I'M ADDING TWO MORE OF MY OWN.

- 1) THERE IS A GOD
- 2) I'M NOT HIM
- 3) GOD LOVES US. INDIVIDUALLY. HE LOVES US DEEPLY AND PROFOUNDLY
- 4) WE CAN TRUST HIM. EVEN WHEN WE DONT- WE CAN.

OUR NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE FOR TODAY COMES FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8&9  
IN THE NRSV IT READS

WE ARE HARD PRESSED ON EVERY SIDE BUT NOT CRUSHED; PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR. PERSECUTED BUT NOT ABANDONED; STRUCK DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED. IN THE VERSION THAT I MEMORIZED THESE VERSES WHEN I WAS IN JUNIOR HIGH, AND THEY BECAME MY FAVORITE IT READ

WE ARE PRESSED ON EVERY SIDE BY TROUBLE BUT ARE NOT CRUSHED OR BROKEN, WE ARE PERPLEXED BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THINGS HAPPEN TO US THE WAY THEY DO, BUT WE NEVER GIVE UP AND QUIT. WE ARE HUNTED DOWN BUT GOD NEVER ABANDONS US. WE FALL DOWN BUT WE GET UP AGAIN AND KEEP GOING.  
LET US PRAY.

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER, PLEASE TAKE OVER THIS SERMON IN THE WAY ONLY YOU CAN DO. LET EACH HEART HEAR WHAT YOU NED THEM TO HEAR. DON'T LET ME SAY

ANYTHING THAT YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SAY AND HELP ME TO SAY ALL THAT YOU DO.  
AMEN.

ABOUT 25 YEARS AGO MY OLDEST DAUGHTER NANCYE AND I WENT FOR OUR HAIR APPOINTMENTS. WE USED THE SAME GIRL AND WE HAD GROWN TO LOVE HER. ON THIS DAY IT WAS CLEAR THAT SHE WAS TROUBLED AND DURING EACH OF OUR APPTS SHE POURED OUT HER HEART. SHE HAD BEEN ON A LONG AND DIFFICULT JOURNEY WITH INFERTILITY AND HAD JUST RECEIVED MORE BAD NEWS. SHE STOOD AT A CROSSROADS WITH DECISIONS TO MAKE AND NEEDED TO TALK. AFTER THAT APPT NANCYE AND I HAD HER ON OUR MINDS AND WERE DISCUSSING IT AND NANCYE SAID SOMETHING THAT I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN. SHE SAID, "MOM REAL FAITH IS MORE THAT JUST BELIEVING THAT JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR US- THOUGH THAT IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL- BUT IN WALKING OUT OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE, REAL FAITH IS ON THAT DAY WHEN THE ONE THING THAT WE HAVE FEARED THE MOST IN OUR LIFE, ACTUALLY HAPPENS, REAL FAITH IS BELIEVING THAT WHEN WE GET TO HEAVEN WE WOULDN'T HAVE CHANGED A THING. AND REAL FAITH IS THE HARDEST THING THAT I EVER ASKED OF US" WELL I'VE GIVEN LOTS OF THOUGHT TO THAT IN THE YEARS SINCE. I CAN BE PRONE TO FEAR AND SOME OF THOSE THINGS HAVE HAPPENED. I'VE LOOKED FOR A VERSE, OR A SHORT SLOGAN, MAYBE EVEN SOMETHING I COULD TATTOO ON MY WRIST. SOMETHING SO THAT WHEN THAT PHONE CALL COMES= WHEN MY WORLD FALLS APART I HAVE SOMETHING TO GO TO.

I FINALLY CAME UP WITH "EITHER I TRUST HIM OR I DON'T". IN 'LIGHT IN MY DARKEST NIGHT' CATHERINE MARSHALL WRITES, WHEN LIFE HANDS US SITUATIONS WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND, WE HAVE ONE OF TWO CHOICES. WE CAN WALLOW IN MISERY, SEPARATED FROM GOD. OR WE CAN TELL HIM, "I NEED YOU AND YOUR PRESENCE IN MY LIFE MORE THAN I NEED UNDERSTANDING. I TRUST YOU TO GIVE M ANSWERS ONLY IF AND WHEN YOU CHOOSE. I THINK THIS MIGHT BE CATHERINE'S VERSION OF 'EITHER I TRUST HIM OR I DON'T'. ONE TUESDAY MORNING I WAS AT WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY HERE AND SHARED MY 'EITHER I TRUST HIM OR I DON'T' AND A WOMAN THAT I LOVE AND DEEPLY ADMIRE SAID, "EITHER I TRUST HIM OR I DON'T.....IS THERE NO MIDDLE GROUND?" AND I SAID "OH! IT'S ALL MIDDLE GROUND!" BECAUSE IT IS, RIGHT? WE ARE HUMAN, LIVING IN A DIFFICULT WORLD- AND WE ARE NOT GOING TO TRUST PERFECTLY ALL THE TIME. BUT IN REFLECTING ON HER QUESTION I THINK I KNOW WHAT SHE WAS ASKING. THE DEPTH OF IT.

IS IT OK TO DOUBT?

IS IT OK TO QUESTION?

DOES TRUSTING MEAN THAT YOU DON'T FEEL ENORMOUS PAIN?

WHAT ABOUT WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SO OVERWHELMING THAT YOU CAN'T TRUST?

WE DON'T HAVE TO GO ANY FURTHER THAN THE LIFE OF JESUS FOR ANSWERS.

WHEN LAZARUS DIED, JESUS CRIED. HE HAD A BETTER GRASP ON AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE THAN WE DO. HE KNEW WHERE LAZARUS WOULD SPEND ETERNITY. HE EVEN KNEW THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO RAISE LAZARUS FROM THE GRAVE. AND YET HE CRIED. HE FELT THAT PAIN.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, WHILE STILL IN UTERO, LEAPT IN HIS MOTHER'S WOMB AT THE PRESENCE OF JESUS- WHEN MARY, CARRYING THE CHRIST CHILD INSIDE- VISITED ELIZABETH. LATER, WHEN HE BAPTIZED JESUS HE GOT A FRONT ROW SEAT AS HE HEAVENS OPENED AND GOD'S VOICE STATED 'THIS IS MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED' AND YET, FROM PRISON, SHORTLY BEFORE HE WAS MURDERED, HE SENT TWO OF HIS DISCIPLES TO ASK JESUS "ARE YOU THE MESSIAH? OR DO WE LOOK

FOR ANOTHER?" AND JESUS DOES NOT CHASTISE JOHN. HE DOESN'T ASK HIM HOW HE COULD DOUBT. HE SENDS BACK THOSE DISCIPLES TELLING THEM, "TELL JOHN WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND HEARD (LUKE 7:18-23) THE BLIND SEE, THE LAME WALK, LEPERS ARE HEALED, THE DEAF HEAR, THE DEAD ARE RAISED, AND THE GOOD NEWS IS PREACHED TO THE POOR".

HE THEN TELLS THE CROWD, 'OF THOSE BORN OF WOMEN, THERE IS NO ONE GREATER THAN JOHN, YET THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GREATER THAN HE.' THE ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE- AND SO REASSURING! SUCH ENCOURAGEMENT. WHEN WE GET TO HEAVEN WE WILL GET TO BE WHO WE WISH WE COULD BE NOW.

EVEN JOHN THE BAPTIST FELL SOMETIMES IN THE 'IN BETWEEN OF TRUST. THE ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE IS DIFFICULT TO SEE AND HOLD ONTO. IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:12 IT SAYS, "FOR NOW WE SEE THRU A GLASS DARKLY BUT THEN FACE TO FACE. NOW I KNOW IN PART, BUT THEN I SHALL KNOW EVEN AS I AM KNOWN. THE MESSAGE SAYS, "NOW WE SEE THINGS IMPERFECTLY LIKE PUZZLING REFLECTIONS IN A MIRROR BUT THEN WE WILL SEE EVERYTHING WITH PERFECT CLARITY."

MY DAD USED TO SAY THAT SO MANY PEOPLE WOULD COME TO HIM SAYING, "WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN I AM GOING TO ASK GOD..... " AND DAD SAID, THEY WON'T. WHEN THEY GET TO HEAVEN THEY WILL SAY "OF COURSE!" OF COURSE- IT IS SO PERFECT- OF COURSE IT HAD TO GO THAT WAY.

IN MATTHEW 14:30-33 WE FIND THE DISCIPLES IN A BOAT, FAR FROM LAND, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. THEY ARE CAUGHT IN A HEAVY STORM. JESUS COMES TOWARD THEM WALKING ON WATER AND SAYS, "DON'T BE AFRAID. TAKE COURAGE. I AM HERE" PETER SAYS, "LORD, IF IT'S REALLY YOU, TELL ME TO COME TO YOU WALKING ON WATER" AND JESUS REPLIES, "YES, COME!" AND WHILE HIS EYES ARE ON JESUS HE WALKS ON WATER. BUT WHEN HIS FOCUS CHANGES TO THE WAVES, HE BEGINS TO SINK AND HE CRIES OUT "JESUS SAVE ME!" THAT MIDDLE GROUND OF TRUST. SOMETIMES THE WAVES ARE ALL WE CAN SEE. SOMETIMES IT IS TOO HARD TO PRAY MORE THAN, "GOD! HELP!" SOMETIMES WHEN WE ARE GOING UNDER WE CAN'T EVEN PRAY THAT AND WE NEED OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST TO PRAY FOR US. WHATEVER PRAYER WE ARE ABLE TO SAY, SCRIPTURE REASSURES US THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERVENES ON THOSE PRAYERS. OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT DEPENDENT ON THE WORDS WE USE.

MY LAST EXAMPLE DOES NOT COME FROM THE BIBLE AND IS MORE RECENT. IN FACT TODAY IS THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY. 80 YEARS AGO TODAY, ON DECEMBER 31 CORRIE TEN BOOM WAS RELEASED FROM RAVENSBRUCK CONCENTRATION CAMP. RELEASED ON A CLERICAL ERROR- OR A MIRACLE FROM GOD. ONE WEEK LATER THE WOMEN IN HER AGE GROUP WOULD BE EXTERMINATED IN THE CREMATORIUM. BUT THE TEN BOOM STORY ACTUALLY BEGINS 100 YEARS EARLIER FOR US. IN 1844, CORRIE TEN BOOM'S GREAT GRANDPARENTS BEGAN A WEEKLY PRAYER SESSION IN THEIR HOME. THAT WEEKLY PRAYER MTG WOULD BECOME A FAMILY TRADITION AND CONTINUE FOR 100 YEARS. IT CONTINUED UNTIL 1944 WHEN THE TEN BOOM FAMILY WAS ARRESTED FOR COMING TO THE AID OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT BETWEEN THE UNDERGROUND WORK THAT THEY TOOK PART IN AND THOSE THEY HID IN THEIR OWN HOME- BEHIND A FALSE WALL IN CORRIE'S BEDROOM- THAT 800 JEWISH LIVES WERE SAVED. AFTER THE ARREST, THE FATHER- CASPER- WAS TOLD THAT DUE TO HIS ADVANCED AGE HE COULD BE RELEASED TO GO HOME AND DIE IN HIS OWN BED. CASPER SAID, "IF I GO HOME TODAY, TOMORROW I WILL OPEN MY DOOR TO ANYONE WHO KNOCKS FOR HELP. IT WOULD BE MY HONOR TO GIVE MY LIFE FOR GOD'S CHOSEN." THAT IS ACTION- PRAYER, SCRIPTURE, ACTION. THE TEN BOOMS EXEMPLIFY IT. CORRIE ASKED FOR A BIBLE WHEN GIVEN ONE REQUEST IN PRISON.

SHE RISKED HER LIFE TO SMUGGLE THAT BIBLE INTO RAVENSBRUCK. HER SISTER, BETSY HELD REGULAR BIBLE STUDIES WITH IT IN THEIR BARRACKS. SCRIPTURE WAS PRICELESS TO THEM. BETSY MANAGED TO THANK GOD FOR HAVING CORRIE WITH HER, FOR THAT BIBLE, AND EVEN FOR THE FLEAS THAT INFESTED THEIR BARRACKS. HER SISTER CORRIE SAID SHE COULD NEVER THANK GOD FOR THE FLEAS AND BETSY SAID "YES CORRIE! EVEN FOR THE FLEAS" THEY WOULD LATER DISCOVER THAT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE FLEAS THAT THEY WERE FREE TO HOLD THEIR BIBLE STUDIES. THE GUARDS AVOIDED POLICING THEIR BARRACKS DUE TO THOSE FLEAS. BETSY'S LAST WORDS TO CORRIE BEFORE SHE DIED IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP WERE, "YOU MUST TELL PEOPLE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED HERE. WE MUST TELL THEM THAT THERE IS NO PIT SO DEEP THAT GOD'S LOVE IS NOT DEEPER STILL. THEY WILL LISTEN TO US CORRIE BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN HERE.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THEY SAVED 800 LIVES BUT THERE IS NO ESTIMATE FOR HOW MANY LIVES WILL SPEND ETERNITY IN HEAVEN DUE TO THEIR MESSAGE. CORRIE WROTE, THE HIDING PLACE, WHICH WAS MADE INTO A MOVIE BY THE SAME NAME AND WENT ON TO SPREAD BETSY'S MESSAGE THRU OUT THE WORLD.

I AM CLOSING WITH A POEM THAT MY DAD RECITED SO OFTEN IF WILL FOREVER BE CONNECTED WITH HIM TO ALL WHO LOVED HIM. I RECENTLY DISCOVERED THAT CORRIE TEN BOOM LIKED TO RECITE IT WHEN SHE SPOKE.

#### THE WEAVER

MY LIFE IS BUT A WEAVING BETWEEN MY LORD AND ME  
I CANNOT CHOOSE THE COLORS. HE KNOWS WHAT THEY SHOULD BE  
OFT TIMES HE WEAVETH SORROW AND I IN FOOLISH PRIDE  
FORGET HE SEES THE UPPER AND I, THE UNDERSIDE  
NOT TILL THE LOOM IS SILENT AND THE SHUTTLES CEASE TO FLY  
WILL GOD ROLL BACK THE CANVAS AND EXPLAIN THE REASONS WHY  
THE DARK THREADS WERE AS NEEDED IN THE WEAVER'S SKILLFUL HANDS  
AS THE THREADS OF GOLD AND SILVER FOR THE PATTERN HE HAS PLANNED.