**Building in Faith: Don’t Fear**  Memory: Isaiah 54:13

Oct. 9th, 2022 Scripture Reading: Hosea 2:16-20

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Last week we started our series “Building in Faith”. I admit, it was a bit of a rough one. We talked about the current declining state of the church, we talked about the “Chemistry test Loophole” which is the temptation to compare ourselves with those around us and come away feeling normal or just as good as the next church. We decided that not good enough! We want more than “normal.” We had to get through some tough statistics and trends regarding the church in America and the United Methodist Church in particular. These were hard things to hear. But, the gospel begins with bad news doesn’t it. The good news isn’t good unless we first know what is bad. And so even as we face a challenging reality, we turn to the trustworthy promises found in Isaiah 54 where we are told to Sing barren church!

**SLIDE 2: We Sing in Faith**

We sing in faith! We rejoice in faith! We build in faith! If you don’t know our church is undergoing a capital fund drive. We are looking to raise money in order to build a pavilion outside in our field. We want to be better able to do ministry outside of these walls. We sing in faith and as Isaiah goes on to say in verse two: “Enlarge the site of your tent, and stretch out the drapes of your dwellings; don’t hold back. Lengthen your tent ropes and strengthen your stakes. To the right and to the left you will burst out.” So, in faith, we build! We don’t hold back!

But why? Why should we build right now? It doesn’t seem like the best time to engage ourselves in a big project. Other expenses could come up. Other issues could arise. What if we can’t raise the money? Maybe we should wait until we have increased membership. Maybe we should play it safe. None of these objections are bad or wrong. But let’s take a look at the rest of Isaiah 54…it may be a little longer section than we are used to, but you will find the contents to be amazing. To all the objections we might have, God says “Don’t fear.” READ verse 4.

**SLIDE 3: Don’t fear, because you won’t be ashamed; don’t be dismayed, because you won’t be disgraced. You will forget the shame of your youth; you’ll no longer remember the disgrace of your widowhood.**

Remember these words were spoken to a barren people…he compares them to a widow which in that time was a harrowing position to be in. A widow had no prospects, no protection. They were very low in the societal pecking order. But we read to verse 5-6 READ.

**SLIDE 4: The one marrying you is the one who made you— the Lord of heavenly forces is his name. The one redeeming you is the holy one of Israel, the one called the God of all the earth.**

**As an abandoned and dejected woman the Lord has summoned you; as a young wife when she is rejected, says your God. Isaiah 54:5-6**

So the image actually changes a little here from widow to divorcee. This would have been even worse than widowhood because now we are talking about someone set aside – dismissed by her husband, rejected. But God comes as a redeemer, as a husband, a provider.

We see the reality of this dynamic played out historically in the story of Ruth. A helpless woman, a widow, clings to her Jewish mother-in-law. She is destitute and barren. She is not even a part of God’s people by birth. She is from Moab. And yet there is hope! In the end she is redeemed by a member of her late husband’s family, a man named Boaz. He takes this abandoned woman as his wife, provides for her needs and she even bears a son. Anyone remember his name? Obed…not the most important name in the Bible but he is a link in the chain to the most important. Obed became the father of Jesse and Jesse was the father of David. So here we have Boaz (that is God’s) redemptive love, grafting in a lowly, poor, disgraced Moabite woman, and using her new family to eventually usher into the world our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is not some small metaphor that Isaiah is employing here. It is a hard and fast theological truth about the unchanging character of God. He is faithful! He is loyal! But wait just one minute, let’s look at verse seven and eight. READ

**SLIDE 5: For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great mercy I will bring you back. In an outburst of rage, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting love I have consoled you, says your redeemer, the Lord. Isaiah 54:7-8**

How can it be that a faithful God would abandon his people, his bride? Would a faithful husband have an outburst of rage? Let’s hold that thought as we take in another verse. READ.

**SLIDE 6: These are like the days of Noah for me, when I promised that Noah’s waters would never again cover the earth. Likewise I promise not to rage against you or rebuke you.**

**Isaiah 54:9**

Isaiah brings us back to the greatest and most dramatic example of divine wrath, the flooding of the entire world. And why did the Lord flood the world? Genesis 6:6 “The Lord regretted making human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken. So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe off of the land the human race that I’ve created.’” God is heartbroken at the evil deeds of mankind and out of a deep sorrow, he makes the difficult decision to punish. It is similar to a spouse who decides to leave their alcoholic partner. The behavior has gotten out of hand. They love each other, yet there is a major disconnect, a major sin standing in the way. As they leave there is fury and rage, but the origin of that anger is heartbreak. Sometimes it takes that rock-bottom moment. A spouse leaving. An accident occurring. A nation being forced into exile. These times serve as a wake-up call, a crushing blow landed in order to bring about repentance. But interestingly, Isaiah is not bringing up this story in order to highlight the death and destruction or even the flood itself. Instead, he wants to point out the promise of God: to never again destroy the earth by flood. Then verse 10 is a reiteration of that promise. A very powerful declaration of God’s love. READ.

**SLIDE 7: The mountains may shift, and the hills may be shaken, but my faithful love won’t shift from you, and my covenant of peace won’t be shaken, says the Lord, the one who pities you.**

**Isaiah 54:10**

 “Faithful love” here and “everlasting love” in verse eight come from the Hebrew word *hesed.* Very simply, *hesed* means love, but it is a much more loaded and heavy word than what we can translate into English. Dr. John Oswald describes it as “completely underserved kindness and generosity.” And it is typically associated with practical action. *Hesed* appears all throughout the Old Testament, 247 times in fact. Maybe its most notable appearance come in its back to back use in Exodus 34:6-7: “The Lord! The Lord! A God who is compassionate and merciful, very patient, full of great *hesed* and faithfulness, showing great *hesed* to a thousand generations…” The doubling up here is meant emphasize the importance of the idea. God’s love is beyond the words we have to describe it, and this love acts on our behalf. This love is definitive of who God is. We continue on to verse eleven READ.

**SLIDE 9: Suffering one, storm-tossed, uncomforted, look, I am setting your gemstones in silvery metal and your foundations with sapphires. I will make your towers of rubies, and your gates of beryl, and all your walls of precious jewels. Isaiah 54:11-12**

Part of the Lord’s *hesed* action is to beautify his bride with all kinds of precious stones, but it’s not just jewelry for the sake of being fancy and sparkly. Rather, he adorns our foundations and walls and towers; places of strength and protection. We are not just a beautiful bride, we are also locked and loaded. We are fully equipped to stand strong against our enemy. We continue…READ to the end.

**SLIDE 10: All your children will be disciples of the Lord— I will make peace abound for your children. You will be firmly founded in righteousness. You will stay far from oppression because you won’t fear, far from terror because it won’t come near you. Isaiah 54:13-14**

**SLIDE 11: If anyone attacks you, it’s none of my doing. Whoever attacks you will fall because of you. Look, I myself created the metalworker who blows the fire of coal and who produces a tool for his work. And I myself created the looter to destroy.**

**Isaiah 54:15-16**

**SLIDE 12: No weapon fashioned against you will succeed, and you may condemn every tongue that disputes with you. This is the heritage of the Lord’s servants, whose righteousness comes from me, says the Lord. Isaiah 54:17**

So this theme of protection and victory continues. Look at some of the things that are said here: We are firmly founded, we don’t have to fear, terror will not come near, your attacker will fall. God takes action on our behalf to pour out upon us faithful, loyal, covenant-based love.

Now I want to make one more observation here that hits very close to my heart. Verse 17 speaks of this victory as our heritage. As long as we remain faithful to live under the stipulations of God’s covenant, as long as we live into the righteousness he provides for us, we will inherit the great benefits of life under his husband-like protection. The idea of heritage here connects to the very beginning of the chapter which we looked at last week. Verse 3, “To the right and to the left you will burst out, and your children will posses the land.” It is our heritage!

But my favorite verse from this whole chapter, the one I am clinging to as a desperate father, comes in verse 13, “All your children will be disciples of the Lord.”

**SLIDE 12: “All your children will be disciples of the Lord.”**

 This is the cry of my heart, right here in ink, right here in God’s word. My wife and I are raising seven of these children, and the odds are against them. When it comes to them possessing an enduring faith, the chances are not great. Our culture has more and more left behind the ways of God. We have traded eternal truth for personal opinion and ancient wisdom for nonsense. And so how do my wife and I move forward? How do we ensure that our kids own a saving faith in Jesus? The fact of the matter is we can’t. We strive to live as faithful servants of the Lord. We strive to model a Christian life and teach them biblical truth and discipline them appropriately. But all our best efforts don’t have a shot against Youtube and other online offerings. We don’t have a shot against a narcissistic culture that peddles self-aggrandizement. We don’t have a shot against the rise of a secular culture. But God does. There is hope! With him we have protection and victory. With him we are promised that all weapons used against us will fail. With him we will not fail. We will entrust our children to the inheritance God has in store for them. We will not fear. We will build up our family in faith. And make no mistake church, my kids are your kids. And your kids are my kids. We all share a responsibility for the young ones around us. Each of us here are builders. And each of our children need to be built up. Children in my neighborhood and throughout this community need to be built up! He says to us, “All your children will be disciples of the Lord.” And so church, I charge you, build in faith!

**SLIDE 13: build in faith!**

 To build in faith is an interesting proposition. On paper, not everything adds up…on paper, not all the details are a accounted for, on paper, this idea should not work. But faith does not operate on paper. God’s equations are not bound to our understanding of numbers. Don’t fear the math! Don’t fear what the paper tells you. And so, in faith, we build. We move forward on a project that we cannot complete on our own power. We move forward trusting in the everlasting *hesed* of a God who will never leave us or forsake us.

Amen.