

May 7, 2017

Mark 13:9-11

I Thessalonian 1:1-10

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War abounds and battles are fought both near and far.
That was the reality then, that is the reality now!
For some of us, we are in the fight of our lives, and for others of
us the battle is brewing, no more than just a wee bit off!

So, with that reality in mind, God offers us instruction on how to
handle such situations: “Beware and Don’t Worry”. Let’s look at
the direction given to “beware”. To beware means to be careful,
alert, and awake.

Beware: Careful

Let’s unpack that for just a moment. Beware means you are
cautious. Yet, it does not mean, don’t move. It means we move
with an awareness of what is above you, behind you, before you,
underneath you and around you.

So, what is then? Above you is God, looking out for you, and
protecting you. Behind you are those who have been supported
and know the difference support can make in hard times, who
now have your back and are there to catch you if and when you
fall and who are there to give you a hand and lift you up when
huge obstacles before you seem insurmountable. Before you are
your spiritual ancestors who have already gone down the path
you are on the verge of taking, and thus now stand before you
because they know what it is ahead of you.

. Then there are those who are around you, who are currently
beside you. They are there, so you know you are never
completely alone, for God has given each of us a pack. The

question is are we alert and awake enough to know who is our wolf pack.

Beware: Alert

Beware means being alert.

Several ways to stay alert are to:

get up and move around,
fuel up with something healthy,
breath deeply,
have face-to-face contact.

These are the things that keep us alert: moving out of what is familiar to us and out of our comfort zone, to make sure we are nourished and nurtured enough to the point of being able to do what we are being asked by God to do, and to take in the Spirit of God which is from the Hebrew word, “breath”. Breath God in regularly and often, and don’t forget that it is not about things, but about people. Look around and see them, then move toward them to the place where you cannot help but notice them as a person. Get up close, and personal!

Beware: Awake

Beware means being awake. And the number one thing that keeps us from staying awake is not enough rest. Too many of us are sleep deprived, and we complain about it to everyone who will listen. Yet, we often do not take what is prescribed for such a condition – rest. Which is all to say, part of beware is about making sure you stay awake by getting the rest you need. If not all your senses seemed blurred, and you end up with great inertia, chronic fatigue, and even despair.

Beware of What?

Our instruction is beware: be careful, alert and awake to the suffering, oppression, injustices, and domination around you and upon you.

Don't Worry

Next, we have the admonition to not worry; “don't worry”! Which seems like a tall order doesn't it. I think we get so much instruction in the Bible regarding fear, because it is a major component of what it means to be human. Yet, to not address our fears and worry is to walk around in this life – impaired!

Given that reality, according to today's scripture, we can do and at times even eliminate worry – the work of faith, the effort of love and the persistence of hope.

The Work of Faith

Let's talk about the work of faith. Faith is work you know! We have to work on our faith. We have to give it time and attention. We have to work out and flex our muscles. The work of faith is about putting in the time and effort to grow in your faith, or at least maintain it, and it also includes taking risks, for that is also how faith deepens.

Faith is Trust

Ultimately on our part, the work of faith is trust. Let's think about the resurrection story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus for just a moment. Suddenly, a stranger joins them on their walk. It is none other than the Jesus, after his resurrection, but they don't recognize him. Yet, that doesn't change the fact that he is present, there with them. I think this happens in my own life, I think he could possibly be absent when I need him, but the problem really is not him, but me. He is there, but I don't

recognize him. That is when trust comes into play. We trust God's promises and faithfulness, despite what appears to us to be absence. Having faith in presence where and when we feel and perceive only absence. Don't worry. You are never alone.

The Effort of Love

Now, from the work of faith (aka. trust), and on to the effort of love. Jesus instituted the reign of love, and then he instructed us to love one another as he loved us, and to love God with all we've got and to love others as we love ourselves. Yet, you and I must be well aware, that there are risks that come with bringing forth and into fruition the reign of love over the greed, hate, and phobias of our day. The reality was it was risky then and it is still risky now.

Living into and out the reign of love is both subversive and dangerous because we are proclaiming a "king" other than the rulers of Jesus day and ours, because we give our allegiance first and foremost to the one they called the Kings of the Jews before they killed him. The question is whether we can hear the voice of the crucified and resurrected Jesus urging us onward and offering assurance.

The Persistence of Hope

And then there is the persistence of hope, which combats worry in a very timely manner. When we hold onto hope and refuse to give up hope, we find we are able to manage and deal with our suffering till glory shows it face.

Perseverance of Hope

We would not be here today as Christians as the Church of Jesus Christ, if our ancestors in faith did not persevere in hope. There are three things that many say are important to overcome if one is acquire and maintain hope, and they are:

Overcoming alienation – which they did through community
Overcoming doom – which they did by looking at the evidence that Jesus was really alive
Overcoming powerlessness – which they did by recognizing the power of God within and through them via the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Hopelessness stops you in your track. Hope keeps you going.

(“Keep Calm, Carry On” origins video)

What shall we do when suffering is all around us, or we when we are already engaged in the fight of our lives? We shall follow Jesus instructions: “Beware, Don’t Worry” – do the work that comes from faith, make an effort that comes from love and demonstrate perseverance that comes from hope. In other words, “Keep Calm and Carry On”.