



Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
Asheville, North Carolina
26 March 2017
Youth Sunday
Sermon: "Be the Bridge"
Luke Shealy, Makahla Stout
Mark 12:28-34
Hebrews 13:1-3, 5-7, 12-16

Music led by Isabel Parker,
along with: Owen Gast, Hannah Engels,
Emily Frye, Paige Kemper, Kaegan Parks

LUKE:

Last fall, I had the opportunity to travel with other students from my school, to Denmark. Our flight was from Atlanta to Copenhagen. The flight started out well, but about the time we were reaching the Atlantic Ocean the speakers crackled, letting all the passengers know that we were heading back to Atlanta because of "technical difficulties." Well, I turned out that those technical difficulties involved electrical components that had almost caught on fire!

Two hours later, after some maintenance, we were back in the air over the ocean- in the same plane that had almost caught on fire the first time! It was about that time when I realized maybe I should have abandoned the plane when it was back on the ground. Let's just say, I was thinking a lot about what the flight attendants said to us before taking off: *"In the event that the oxygen masks drop, please secure your own mask before helping others."*

Today's texts remind us that before we can give of ourselves, we must first seek to have a firm foundation. As Christians our oxygen mask - our firm foundation - is our faith. We must trust that God will provide the oxygen. Once we have that mask on; then, we can wholeheartedly devote ourselves to helping others. Well, how can we best do this? How can we secure our mask "of faith" and help people with theirs as well?

MAKAHLA:

"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Jesus lived this every day. Jesus taught us about it - over and over again throughout our Bible. Love God and love your neighbors. Trust God and trust others. Give all we can to God and give all we can to one another. In essence, be a bridge of connection and hope between God and each other.

Our passages talk about the importance of trusting and giving. The definition of trust is to rely on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something. Essentially, we are called to trust ourselves, our neighbors, our leaders, and our God, so that we are able to

give our time, service, money, compassion, forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

These days, it feels like we are doing the opposite of trusting and giving. Life is hard and full of different types of adversities such as loss, illness, unemployment, grief, injury, divorce, or even a new adventure where we don't know the outcome. It's so hard for us to fully trust and give because it requires us to completely let go and lean into an unknown outcome. We often use fear, apprehension, and indifference as a reason to not take action.

Not only this, these days we've been led to believe that separation - driven by hate, fear, lies and division - is the answer. But it's not. Now is NOT the time to be separated. Jesus teaches that in order to survive in this wilderness, we must NOT divide ourselves with walls but instead unite ourselves through bridges.

In order to trust and give, it takes faith: faith in God and faith in one another. When you give a person something, you give it to them because you trust them; and when you trust someone, you're willing to give them what you have because you've put your faith in them. "Alone we are like one drop, but united we are like an ocean."

ISABEL (sung):

Bind us together Lord

Bind us together with chords that cannot be broken

Bing us together, Lord

Bind us together with love.

~

MAKAHLA:

What does trust look like?

LUKE:

What does it take to really trust God and trust one another?

MAKAHLA:

This past January, I attended the Presidential Inauguration in Washington D.C. While there, I was a part of many historical events: including attending the actual inauguration and being surrounded by some of the world's top leaders. Not to mention getting caught up in the chaos of a violent riot that broke out on the same street where we were eating lunch!

While those events were unforgettable, the most astounding one came the day after the Inauguration, when I witnessed 500,000 women, men and children march on Washington. People of different backgrounds, races, genders, and ages came together to stand in solidarity for human rights.

What made this even more astounding was to hear that more than three million other people were not only marching across the country, but around the world! During a time of

such uncertainty, it was inspiring to know that so many people across the globe were putting their trust in one another and standing side-by-side.

This morning's text tells us *"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid."* As many of us know, it's not always easy to trust God and others. I personally know that I struggle to always trust- and at times it can be scary. But no matter how hard it is to trust, God encourages us to keep trying - for God continues to trust in us, promising to be there every step of the way.

ISABEL & youth singers:

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~

LUKE:

How do we give to others?

MAKAHLA:

How do we care for our neighbors and people who we don't consider to be neighbors?

LUKE:

We rarely put ourselves into the shoes of those society tells us to dismiss: whether it be people who are incarcerated or people detained at Guantanamo bay. As people of faith, we must not forget those who we exile.

"Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them. Those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured."

In a recent radio documentary produced by Samantha Broun, Samantha discusses a violent crime that was committed against her mother by a recently released prisoner, named Reginald McFadden. After this life-scarring event, Samantha's family testified at a hearing. Their testimony provoked new regulations to be put in place - making it more difficult for prisoners to ever leave prison early.

Samantha was later filled with guilt when she realized that these new, harsher policies towards prisoners were really driven by fear. Samantha knew that she could not easily forgive Reginald for what he did, yet she knew that WE should not forget people in prison, or dismiss them as anything less than who they are: fellow human beings.

Surely many of us can resonate with Samantha's story. We know what it is like to let fear direct our decisions and lead us down paths that we may later regret. Our faith in Jesus teaches us to remember the prisoner, reach out to the stranger, comfort the tortured, not be afraid.

Fear holds us back from being our most pure and true selves. When we abandon that fear we can be a bridge to communities outside of our own. God calls us to make efforts to conquer our fears, to suck in the breath of faith and reach out to the people around us.

Though we may be uncomfortable with becoming a bridge of empathy, the effects of reaching out - into that wilderness - strengthens the community as a whole. In a time when everything seems to be polarized and politicized, simply letting someone different than us know that we care about them can mean the world - or sometimes, even change it.

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LUKE:

How can we be a bridge for peace, justice and love in the world?

MAKAHLA:

How can we embody empathy, live into trust, give all that we can to God and to each other?

LUKE:

Friends, God teaches that our efforts here on earth are meant to improve the lives of others. This looks different for each of us. The way I give of my time is by volunteering with Asheville Greenworks and the composting program at my school - working to spread the message of caring for God's creation.

This call to "be a bridge" and care for creation has led me to organize the Asheville March for Science. I hope that this march will be the first of many opportunities to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together to advocate for science education, research, and people-first policy making.

We all have different ways that we can donate our time, talents, and resources.

I wonder where and how God is calling YOU to be a bridge in our world.

MAKAHLA:

This year, I have been serving as a member of the Presbyterian Youth Council: helping to plan youth events for our presbytery. These events are not only fun ways for our youth to connect with other Presbyterians, but we're also doing service work and helping each other grow in faith. Serving on the youth council is one way that I answer God's call to be a bridge builder; but there are many ways for us - as a church - to get involved and reach out.

Already, Grace Covenant has made efforts to help our community: from our garden to conversations around the sanctuary movement. And we're not done yet. We're at a turning point here in our church, where we have the opportunity to consider where God's

monumental calling is leading us.

I wonder where and how God is calling us- as a community - to be a bridge.

~

LUKE:

Grace Covenant, the road ahead will not be easy;
but Christ promises to walk with us through the wilderness.

MAKAHLA:

And even though we may not know when we will get out of these woods, we do know that
it's going to take trusting one another - and God - to get through it.

LUKE:

By trusting, we can give to those who need what we can provide.

MAKAHLA:

We can open our doors to the most vulnerable.

LUKE:

We can unite our neighbors in times of quarrel.

MAKAHLA:

Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind."

LUKE:

"And love your neighbor as yourself."

MAKAHLA:

It's time to let go of our fear,

LUKE:

Embrace and strengthen our faith,

MAKAHLA:

And be a bridge of hope - together.

ISABEL & youth singers & congregation:

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