



Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church

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“Tether” 1 Peter 1:3-9

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Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

-CEB Translation

Tether, this is the title of my message today. You know we choose these titles at least a week before preaching and pray Spirit shows up. Upon my first reading and thoughts on the scripture you just heard, the image of a tether came to my mind. When I think about faith in this time we find ourselves in, I thought of the image of a tether.

The image you see on your bulletin and on the screen is one of an underwater reflection of a boat that is tethered. I have been learning some things about tether- see I am so immersed I have started to refer to them as a person. So, I thought I would share with you some of my new-found knowledge on the subject.

First from dictionary.com:

Tether

noun

a rope, chain, or the like, by which an animal is fastened to a fixed object so as to limit its range of movement.

the utmost length to which one can go in action; the utmost extent or limit of ability or resources.

verb (*used with object*)

to fasten or confine with or as if with a tether.

Digital Technology. to use (an electronic device, usually a smartphone or tablet) to enable a wireless internet connection on another nearby device, often a laptop:

There's no Wi-Fi, so I'll have to tether my phone to my laptop.

The tether I was thinking of is some sort of rope that attaches to an object and connects it to another one. The rope can be adjusted in length depending on how close you want the object to be tethered.

There are many tutorial videos on how to use a tether for an animal to keep it close. There are also a variety of accessories for a tether that can make it easier to utilize. Tethering typically involves knotting of some sort in order to ensure the tether holds. Technology has created clips and locks that can make tethering faster and supposedly more sturdy and long lasting. These devices also make connecting and disconnecting the tether faster.

Tethers have been used in rescues on land and water. A tether is a necessity for any water vehicle to be docked when returning to land.

Synonyms for tether include bind, confine, hinder, shackle, rope, secure, tie and fetter but I digress.

And then for the deep dive into Youtube for tether - thinking, I could find a simple "how tethers work video" ... there are lengthy instructional videos for that but the ones I was most drawn to were the tether ball videos.

I don't know about you but there were at least 4 tether ball courts on the playground of my elementary school. I do not ever remember being taught how to play tetherball but the gist was that two people stood on opposite sides of the circular court. You started serving in one direction and your opponent was trying to hit the ball in the opposite direction with one of you "winning" when the tethered ball had wound around the pole with no rope to spare.

What I remember is hitting this as hard as I could and hoping I wouldn't get hit. It was an easy way to pass the time and from my perspective did not take a lot of skill. Clearly there is more to it... rules, pointers on serving and form - there are videos on Youtube to teach you... but, I thought videos like these were far more entertaining.

Tether Ball <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgYc4n26F-o> 0:09- 0:41

These may get a laugh and also cause us to cringe.

There is some wisdom in here - you see, you have to know how the tether works and what the

possibilities are once you start the game...you need to pay attention or the thing that is supposed to be enjoyable can whack you in the face or be used to hurt your partner...there are specific dynamics to the tether. **You need to be clear what, or who you tether to.**

In utero we are physically tethered by the umbilical cord, arguably the most dynamic of tethers giving us all we need to grow and survive. And after 9 months we join the outside world and this tether is cut. Yet, there is still a connection. We search for the sound of familiar voices, for comfort and for sustenance.

Many of you are familiar with the children's book, the Invisible String. This story starts with children, startled out of bed by thunder, going to their mother for comfort. She assures them that they are safe, that it is ok, they are never alone, she is still with them and for them to return to bed. Unconvinced, they ask how she can be with them and out in the living room at the same time. The mother goes on to talk about the invisible string that connects them to those they love no matter where they are.

The children ask more and more questions about how far this invisible string reaches, Under the sea, in Paris, in Space, with an uncle who has died.

The invisible string is not severed when we do things we know we shouldn't do or when we don't listen to one another.

This invisible string is also connected to beloved animals and others we love who may be far away....

The world is covered with invisible strings.

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, also known as Low Sunday. The celebration of the resurrection is more distant, the crowds are gone, some are still recovering from the emotional whiplash of Holy Week. Emotions are right at the surface and we are tired. And yet, we are a part of this community, a community not unlike those after the resurrection. So much was and is hanging in the balance, the world was off kilter - is off kilter, and the hope that they had held on to so tightly surfaced in ways they had not anticipated.

Trust was broken and built. Love had overcome the Empire, and hate and all those things that destroy... it was glorious... but um... now we are here, still in this world, longing for our hope to keep strong, for us to live like Easter people.

Remember, in our Easter Story, the disciples are locked in the upper room... in fear, feeling so

far away from their beloved Jesus. Feeling horrible because of all that had transpired. They were so wrapped up in fear that they could not see that Jesus was right there - the joy was there for them and they missed it.

Friends, no matter what has happened – we have this access to joy right here, and WE ARE HERE... Amen?

That invisible string, the tether has us connecting here in person or online, we are tethered.

And even though we are here some may be starting to feel the familiar tether to our hope loosening, the once, strong pull becomes weaker and our resolve may be waning.

The writer of this passage in 1 Peter is very aware of the human condition, the ways humans are, well, human. The people were holding on to the promise of resurrection, living in contrast to a world filled with death-dealing practices, rhetoric and oppression. They were a community who understood suffering and needed encouragement. They were being encouraged and directed to live in the tension of suffering and joy.

So appealing.... here is your life: You have been through so much, you understand God to be faithful, the promise of the resurrection gives you hope that there is always more, this is joyful. Celebrate. BUT know that suffering will not end because... well, humans. Life will still be hard but we are called to live with indescribable joy.

When you encounter suffering, are you still tethered?

Are you holding on to the boundless love of God, the promise of resurrection?

How do you understand suffering?

The writer of our scripture for today talks about suffering saying:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Generally in this room, our understanding of suffering is limited.

Breathe, hear me out....

There is no doubt all of us can recall times of suffering or ways we continue to struggle with suffering from the past or the ways we still need to heal from deep wounds. But, when we

think of history, of our context and our status as western world people suffering is very subjective and contextual. And we don't typically compare our suffering to that of Christ's suffering on the cross. We may allude to it in prayers and songs but rarely do we compare it to the kind of suffering that includes betrayal, torture and public execution. I say this for perspective and to remind us that others are and have endured far more. Sometimes we can separate ourselves from the suffering of the world as a tool to keep that suffering at a distance. Our faith requires that we understand and identify the suffering inside ourselves and in the world.

Many have interpreted this scripture to think that the suffering we endure is from God, in order to increase our faith. Phrases like "Why is God testing me?" or "God doesn't give me more than I can handle." - blech, nope, I don't subscribe to this, I reject this.

Why would God save us to make us suffer some more?

The truth is this: if indeed we are following Jesus and proclaiming the kind of liberation and abundant love for everyone and are in it for the long-haul.... we are going to experience suffering - **hard stop**.

This suffering will come from a broken world, desperate for power at all costs, not from a God desperate to love and liberate us.

If indeed we are Easter People we need to accept that suffering will come, because we know the truth and the truth is not popular. What we don't need to accept, what Jesus could not tolerate is oppression. Oppression of any kind is to be resisted.

This means we need to believe and act like those who follow Jesus whose joy comes when brown and black bodies are not dismissed and discarded, whose lives are honored not as statistics of despair but pillars of strength and a reflection of God's powerful and boundless artistry.

Are we proclaiming Jesus whose joy comes when we show up for trans children who cannot vote but whose very humanity is being erased before it has even been seen?

Are we willing to follow Jesus whose joy is made manifest in the ways we keep coming to the table, even when we are frustrated, forlorn and feeling the weight of this world?

Can we trust that following Jesus together, sharing all that we are, our scruples, our history, our

dreams for the future, is a practice of resistance that will yield unspeakable joy?

When we say Christ is our Salvation, we are stating that Christ is about preserving the wholeness and health... of everyone. Salva is the Greek root of preservation, of saving. Christ's salvation is for ALL OF US. This should result in unspeakable joy!

And dear Siblings, we are tethered and we are tired. Part of the good news of Easter is that we are not alone - NOT EVER! There is a mighty invisible web of tethers stringing us to God and one another. Can you see it? Can you imagine this?

This means that We - capital WE, need to remind one another of joy wherever it can be found. Find ways to remind and embody the Psalmists who proclaims:

"my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure"¹.

I am a joy seeker. I love to laugh. I think this is part of my call to the world and is part of how I experience the Spirit at work.

When I am especially emotionally exhausted, I take a Bluey Break. Some of you know what I am talking about, for those of you who have no idea, let me be the first to bless you with Bluey.

Bluey was created for television, animated stories of a family of Blue Heelers. Originating in Australia and recently bought by Disney, these 9 minute episodes bring me joy! I would be hard pressed to choose one episode as a favorite but during Lent I was reminded of an episode that encourages joy and how we can make space for joy in any given moment.

The episode is Dance Mode.

Bandit the dog dad eats the last of Bingo, his daughter's chips. She was not finished with them. Chili, the dog mom is also in hot water because she gave Bandit the go-ahead thinking Bingo was finished with her chips.

Mama Chili asks Bingo how they can make it up to her.

Insert Bluey, the ever-helpful older sister with an idea for her sister. It is Dance Mode. Dance mode is a game of sorts. Whenever someone yells "Dance Mode" the parents need to stop whatever it is they are doing and dance.

The parents agree and the episode takes them in public forcing the parents to let go of shame

¹ Psalm 16:9 New Revised Standard Version, Bible

or awkwardness and dance with joy in the moment. Here you see when Chili got *Dance Moded* while crossing the road.

The beauty of it all is that the dancing was part of the healing of what had been wronged. The result of relationships that call one another in and move toward repair caused a yielding to one another, a recognition of connectedness that gave way to joy, for everyone.

Siblings, there is a freedom that comes from joy that can and will fuel us through the struggles, through that which tries to distract us.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

May the tether of our Faith continue to bring us together, for truth, for support and for liberation. Amen.