

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Deo Volente
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church
Sunday January 9 2022
by the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“Coping in a Crisis”

Romans 8:14-17

A man was walking along a narrow path, not paying much attention to where he was going. Suddenly he slipped over the edge of a cliff. As he fell, he grabbed a branch growing from the side of the cliff. Realizing that he couldn't hang on for long, he called for help.

“Is anybody up there?”

“Yes, I'm here!”

“Who's that?”

“The Lord”

“Lord, help me!”

“Do you trust me?”

“I trust you completely, Lord.”

“Good. Let go of the branch.”

“What???”

“I said, Let go of the branch.”

(After a long pause)

“Is there anybody else up there?”

When a crisis comes, what then? How will we cope, when our crisis comes? Will we be able to take control, and come through it; or will we be crushed?

Our world seems to stumble from one crisis to another. We open our newspapers or switch on a television, and we are inundated with story after story about some crisis in our country or in some other country. Somewhere there are is national, international, political, industrial, or environmental crisis. The lists of crises are endless.

In our personal life, a crisis is always possible. None of us knows when we will have to come up against a crisis. And the question is, how will we cope? Will we come through it? Will we be able to take control of the crisis.

In this passage, Paul shows us three principles for taking control in a crisis.

I

We cope in a crisis when we firstly, **minimize our fears**. Paul says in the Scriptures *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you*

have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out 'Abba! Father!'"(8:14-15)

Fear is a funny emotion. When we allow it to take control of us it empties us of energy and enthusiasm. But when we take control of it, and face it; it infuses us with a new energy and forces us to move forward.

When we allow our fears to take control of us, the result is, we will be crushed. If we take control of it, we will begin to see more clearly the direction we need to take. That is why to surrender to outside forces is really to surrender ourselves.

I have encountered this truth a number of times over the years; sadly, always with tragic results. In one case, it was with a person who chose to surrender his principles of faith, because of pressure from outside forces. The result was he lost himself – and he has not yet been able to recover. He has never been the same since. When we allow our fears to take control of us in a crisis, we end up surrendering ourselves to outside forces. We forget who we are, and whose we are.

The one thing that I have discovered as I have meant the Presidents of Countries and Heads of States and CEO's of corporations, is that we are the culminations of the choices we make and the actions we take.

I just finished reading the Biography of a woman I had the privilege of meeting privately with prior to a luncheon she was speaking at. She sent her biography from her Presidential Palace in Latvia to me in thanks for organizing and hosting the luncheon.

Her name is Vaira Vike-Freberga, the President of Latvia and nominee for the Head of the UN. She came to Canada after fleeing Stalinist Russia as a young girl with her family. The boats, one of which she and her family were on, were being bombed as they escaped. She later arrived in Canada and at 17 years of age began working at a bank in Toronto as she took night courses in psychology. The decisions she made and the choices she made all were because she wanted to help her people who were in exile, in Canada and else where cope with the trauma and in so doing help her self as well.

Vaira Vike-Freberga later graduated with a PH.D in psychology and began teaching at a University in Montreal. She also, worked closely with the Latvian community. Over the years she became a leader within that community and then upon taking early retirement, returned to her homeland where she was elected President of Latvia.

Every decision she made was about making a difference for the Latvian community and it ultimately lead her to being the President of her homeland.

We are the culmination of the choices we make and the actions we take. Where have yours taking you?

Vaclav Havel, the distinguished playwright and now President of Czechoslovakia wrote of this in an essay about green grocer in Prague, a city "which had been cowed since 1960". This green grocer was told by the communist party to put a notice in his shop window exhorting the worker to unite. The man first put up the notice in his window and then took it out again. He knew that doing this, would cost him. It would mean no more holidays, or pay or perhaps no schooling for his children. Nevertheless, he refused the spread the party lies any longer, but rather to live in truth, not fear. Havel tells us that it was that moment that fear died in Prague. He quotes a proverb loved by Solzhenitsyn, "the one word of truth that outweighs the whole world."

II

We cope in a crisis when we minimize our fears and also as we **maximize our faith.** *"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out 'Abba! Father!'"(8:14-15)*

I am reminded of the story about the sophomore student at Yale University who said to the chaplain, "Sir, you must admit that religion is just a crutch?" The chaplain replied, "You are right, but who isn't limping?" Everybody limps in life because of something and everybody has a crutch. We happen to believe that the Lord is the best crutch there is!

A few years ago I was at our event and I met a man who wanted to argue against belief in God. He used the same lame argument that states, "Why would God create a world that allows babies to be born with deformities and wars to be fought? There must not be any God. Or if there is a God, why doesn't He do anything?" I stated, "He has, he created you and me." He got angry at that point; and stated a few things not worth repeating. To which I said, "Listen, I know what I have done because of my belief in God. I have cared for over 1000 crack and heroin babies. What have you done with your lack of belief in God?" He said, "Nothing." I responded, "Well, then, I have no problem with your being wrong."

We can maximize our doubt and do nothing. Or we can maximize our faith and do something.

A woman was at work when she received a phone call that her daughter was very sick with a fever. She left her work and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication for her daughter.

When returning to her car she found that she had locked her keys in the car. She was in a hurry to get home to her sick daughter.

She didn't know what to do, so she called her home and told the baby sitter what had happened and that she did not know what to do. The baby sitter told her that her daughter was getting worse. She said, "You might find a coat hanger and use that to open the door."

The woman looked around and found an old rusty coat hanger that had been thrown down on the ground, possibly by someone else who at some time or other had locked their keys in their car. Then she looked at the hanger and said, "I don't know how to use this." So she bowed her head and asked God to send her some help.

Within five minutes an old rusty car pulled up, with a dirty, greasy, bearded man who was wearing an old biker skull rag on his head. The woman thought, "This is what you sent to help me?" But, she was desperate, so she was also very thankful.

The man got out of his car and asked her if he could help. She said, "Yes, my daughter is very sick. I stopped to get her some medication and I locked my keys in my car. I must get home to her. Please, can you use this hanger to unlock my car?"

He said, "Sure." He walked over to the car, and in less than one minute the car was opened. She hugged the man and through her tears she said, "Thank you so much! You are a very nice man."

The man replied, "Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison today. I was in prison for car theft and have only been out for about an hour."

The woman hugged the man again and with sobbing tears cried out loud, "Oh. Thank you God! You even sent me a Professional

Taking control of a crisis is having the courage to continue even if everyone around you says you can't. And then believing that God will intervene.

Solzhenitsyn calls this the "rule of the last inch". It is, he tells us, the last inch that counts. Not all the other inches, but the last inch. Dag Hammarskjöld tells us that when we have reached our limit and can do no more and go no further, "it is now, now that you must not give in." Nor must you give up. It is then that one must hold on. It is then that we must hold on to faith. For faith will never fail you.

One such moment comes near the end of the battle of Agincourt, in Shakespeare's, Henry V. The conflict was loud and confused, as battles are. Young Henry returns to his camp to catch his breath and regain his strength. He is streaked with grime and smeared with blood and so weary that he can hardly raise his sword. Just then the French envoy comes. Henry asks, "How goes the day?" the reply to the question was, "The day is yours!" Henry had won without knowing it. Victory was his when all he could think of was how weary he was and how overwhelmed his men seemed. And it was so, because he refused to surrender to his foes.

Now none of us have to go and battle the French; but some of us do have battles to finish. Some of us have been battling against fear and outside forces--both large and small--in our lives for years. But by minimizing our fears and maximizing our faith, we are able move forward.

III

We cope in a crisis when we minimize our fears and maximize our faith, and also **manifest our future**. Paul remembered who he was and whose he was. He said, "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs, also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*"(15-16)

He was saying don't live as slaves to fear, but live as fellow heirs--sons and daughter--of God. You were meant for so much more.

So many people go through life having surrendered their personal, emotional, spiritual, freedom. They have stopped moving forward because of the fences in front of them. Or the fear that is chasing them. They have allowed themselves to be fenced in by the pressures, pain or problems of a crisis; rather than remembering who they are and whose they are.

Sean

We don't know what tomorrow holds. But we do know Who holds the future. That has always been enough for me. What about you? You think about that. Amen.