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Sermon 411 - Luke 23:44-49

Father, Into your hands I commit my spirit

On February 17 of 2017 our lives as Americans were changed because of two very simple words. These words struck according with all kinds of people, people who agreed or disagreed with them and the meaning behind it. The two words that changed everything are, “Fake News.” Here is the tweet that President Donald Trump sent, ““The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!”” Since that time the world and media has been responding. I was doing research and found that Google will in the future offer fact checking services on their home page as they partner with snopes and politifact. Facebook, I just went on this week and found these tips to spot and pick up on False News. These two words are what I believe led to this Time Article, “Is Truth Dead?” A quick side bar. As a pastor I was struck by this one in particular because I believe we live in a land where subjective, personal truth outweighs, objective, absolute truth. An example of this if I were to tell you the moon is actually made of grey cheese. We live in an age where if someone were to reference the actual materials found on the moon through exploration and missions. Saying no it is not in fact grey cheese, but rock of some sort. I could still say, “Who are you to say my grey cheese theory is incorrect. I’m going with mine. Let’s agree to disagree” And honestly I am a fan of absolute truth over subjective truth. But I bring this up because I do believe that whatever political side you are on, and I don’t care if you love Fox or CNN, I do believe there are false messages out there. And they need to be waded through, tested, and fact checked. Thank you Google for working on that problem for us.

But as you’ve come to church this morning, and as we get to discuss spiritual things, I bring this up because I believe there is a greater source of Fake News than what is being said on CNN or Fox, depending on your opinion. And here’s my first point *Feelings are the greatest source of fake news*. Or at least they have the potential to be. And if Google could find a way to fact check the way I feel, and give truth past it, they would really be on to something. Let me give you an example.

This past week was my birthday. I’m an old man closer to heaven, hallelujah and amen. And I am not a morning person. Where are my people? You are not a morning person. It probably means I’m not doing this adulting thing very well, but regardless I am not a morning person. And as a non morning person I don’t feel loved or lovely. Those feelings don’t wash over me. All I feel is tired, and like I need space to recalibrate to life. But on the morning of my birthday, my girls who are morning people, did things that proved they loved me. Breakfast in bed, which included donuts. And I came down to a table of cards and gifts. It was an outpouring of love. But even in those moments where I have all the signs and facts proving I’m loved. I don’t feel that yet, or at least not completely I will later after coffee, because I still feel tired.

Now this happens all the time spiritually. You can hear you’re forgiven. But I feel guilty. You can hear God’s from Jeremiah 29, “God has plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to

give you hope and a future.” But I don’t feel like it’s going to work out. You can hear God is with you and will never leave you. But I feel so alone.

And what would happen if we let our feelings, those liars, that fake news, win out. I saw a great video that illustrates what would happen if our feelings win the day. You’re going to end up with a ton of girl scout cookies.

So how do we win the battle over fake news? This is where our lesson comes in to play, and Jesus example. We’re in this series called Words of Life from a dying man. We see such hope, such love in the words he gives us, even as he is dying. And if you’re just stepping into this series with us feel free to catch up online. But there is absolutely no one Jesus feels loved or good on the day he died. But he pushes passed his feelings. He keeps in minds what the true story is. That he is winning. That he is showing the greatest love. And so he hangs on the cross. And with these words, these are his final words, he shows us what it is to trust in fact over feeling. Let’s get into and read from Luke’s account. So in the midst of what he felt, he still clung to faith that he had a Father who would receive him. This is an awesome word. Can you turn to the person next to you and say, “If you feel him or not, he’s here.”

It’s been a very gray spring here in Chicago. I had to laugh at the meme my Bella made. The last two weeks have seen more gray than sunshine. Sox fans they delayed that opener like 3, 4 days. And it is interesting the effect that sun can have on our persona and life. You may or may not have heard of Seasonal Affective Disorder or (SAD). I’m of the mind that we all get that too a degree. I tested how many SAD people there were the other day, and at the end of a gray stretch like 6 days in a row went to the DMV. That was not a good decision.

The sun or the lack thereof had significance on the day Jesus died as well. As we look to our lesson it said, “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining.” And as I was translating this past week I had to pause at this point. Because another translation was the sun was dying out. And I was like well at least someone or in this case something is empathetic to Jesus. His disciples left him, his followers went in a week from shouting Hosanna to Crucify, his Father had turned away. But at least he has creation’s empathy. For *the light died out as the light of the world was dying.*

But I bring this up, first cause I thought creation’s empathy was cool, but also because isn’t this what our walk with God is like. *We have gray and sunny days spiritually.* The sunny days are awesome, it’s like you can feel the favor of God. Everything is lining up, the kids are healthy and getting along, you can see how it’s going to work out, you can like visibly see God answering your prayers. Even the little ones. Like make it green, make the traffic good on Friday. Like wow God you’re amazing. But then the grey hits. You can’t see how it works out, you pray and it’s like the opposite of what you asked happens, you go through something and you can’t see the silver lining. You’re being pushed past your limits. The devil is intensely on your back. And it just feels like heaven is silent.

Jesus knew gray spiritual days. This was a literal and metaphorical gray day. And it’s not just that he felt like heaven was silent, it’s that it actually was silent. As we’ll take a look at on Good Friday, Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) So this is behind feeling a gray day, to the fact it actually was gray. Jesus knows what it is like to feel heaven’s silence. It’s not are you there, it’s you are not there, in a way that we will never

experience. So he can relate to us on our gray spiritual days. Because he was bearing the curse of sin was forsaken by his Father. But what does he do? How does he get through what he feels.

What's interesting about the words Jesus speaks is that they are actually words from a Psalm. Psalm 31:5 "Into your hands I commit my spirit." And it reminds me of how Jesus fought off the devil. Every time the devil came tempting him as recorded in Scripture, he used a passage. So when the devil comes tempting us on the gray days, when he would love to lock us in to feelings that are not healthy or good. *We move passed feelings with a passage*. Now if you've been at Amazing Love for a while this teaching is not new. But it is so necessary. That we keep running back to Scripture. To see what he says.

Reminds me of the show Mythbusters. Like they did a show on duct tape. Can duct tape hold up a 5000 pound car - it sure can. Can you make a boat out of duct tape - yes. But can duct tape stop a car going 60mph - no way. So also in our own lives we have work to do of find the facts, not our feelings.

And what's interesting is that there are few facts even in this lesson enough to shape our feelings. A few facts in the words of life Jesus is speaking. I was listening to a sermon by Rick Warren and he helped pick out the comfort found in these words of life.

The first fact you and I learn is this: *We have a compassionate father*. It's the first word Jesus says in our phrase for today. But it wasn't just Jesus who had the right to call God Father. When he was teaching the disciples how to pray, he told them here's the way to start. Call out to your father. The implications of our faith in Jesus is this stated in Romans, "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (8:15) Abba is the most simple form of language to say. I don't know a first word for your child maybe for some it was dada. Or mama. Those kind of links you have to earthly parents is the even strong link we can have to God.

And this was a huge paradigm shift. Up until this point the people and God were separated. God was up there, we were down here. As believers in the Old Testament. The priest would pray for you, the priest would sacrifice for you. The priest would enter the temple, and only the high priest could enter the most holy place one time each year to make sacrifice. The name for God yaweh they wouldn't even say out loud. Instead they would say adonai. Because God was distant. But Jesus was changing all of this. Jesus as God came down to our level. And Jesus taught his disciples the true relationship we now have with God through faith in him. And this was all symbolized by this verse. "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." (45) This curtain that had separated the holy place from the most holy place. This curtain a picture of separation and distance was done. And we have a God who is nearby, and close. A God who will never leave us or forsake us. And the fact is he is here now whether you feel him or not. The fact is he is there on the gray and sunny spiritual days.

There's another fact. *We are safe in God's hands*. This concept reminds me of the movie Kong: Skull Island. Anyone see it. Seems like King Kong is getting bigger all the time. In one version he's climbing the empire state building, in another he is as big as the empire state building. But because of the size of King Kong, he can do incredible things with his hands. He can swat helicopters from the sky, he can defeat an monstrous octopus, and he can defend the

people from the weird lizard creatures. And yet Kong's hands are tender enough to grab the girl as she is sinking, and to save her.

God's hands are better than King Kong's. They are hands of defense. He is strong enough to fight off the devil. He is strong enough to defend us from our enemies. I love the prophet Isaiah who said, "I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (41:10) But they are the same hands that have saved us. Isaiah also recorded, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short. That it cannot save" (59:1) So they are the hands that slay the great dragon, and the hands that won salvation. And they are the hands that hold us each and every day, feeling or not. As it says, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28)

Just two concepts, two facts Jesus points out that breathe life to us even as he is dying. But there are more. *God receives us*. Jesus is certain he will be received, and because of Jesus we can be certain our God receives. He receives our prayers, our offerings, he receives our hearts, and our very selves in the end because of Jesus. You know I'm always looking for words of fact that I can speak over my life, and I've printed out a page for you today that I hope does the same for you.

And maybe it's not just in what Jesus says, but how he says. Look again at the how, "Jesus called out with a loud voice" (46) Some other translations say that he shouted. And what if on our gray days instead of glibly saying these things. I'm not feeling so well, but yeah I know my Father loves me, and he's got me safe in his hands, and he receives my prayers. I know the promises. What if the solution is to loudly proclaim. I have a Father, and I he is a good father. And I know the hands that hold me. The same ones that molded mountains, raised the sun, and carved the grand canyon. And I am heard. I'm heard whether I make sense or not, whether I'm having a good day or not. Whether he says yes or not. He receives me!

But it's a fight to get there. It's a fight to work past what you feel and declare the fact and do the right thing. And I think much of the Christian life is about this *fight for it when you don't feel it*.

I was reading this past week about Paul who shared the Gospel to many people but in one of the places he shared the word they threw stones at him for it, and left him for dead. It's after that encounter he said we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. But what was remarkable was how he fought for the sake of the mission to do God's work. Look at this interchange. "They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. 21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples." Now right about here, I would be done. And how much do you think he physically and emotionally felt like sharing the word. It must have been a fight to get up, a fight to preach again.

I look at his way and I observe my way and I'm like. I give up on the fight way too quickly. I give up on the fight to do the right thing over and against my feelings. To live for God when it's hard to do. To praise the Lord when I don't feel good. I'm not a great fighter all the time for the ways and the will of God. Can you relate to this. Giving up on prayer when you don't see an answer immediately, giving up on his ways when there is pressure, maybe at times

giving up on him because you couldn't sense him. This my friends, this lack of fight is the sin we want repent of today. It's what we want to wash off today, and be renewed.

Because we see Jesus hanging on the cross. And we see the face, the voice, the activities of a fighter. Someone who wouldn't give up until the work was done, and someone who emotionally would push past what he felt to cling to what was true. A commentator said, "Despite the temporary sense of abandonment he felt during the hours of darkness, he knew his Father loved him and would receive his spirit upon his death. Jesus remained faithful to the very end." (Furtick) And make no mistake it was a fight to remain faithful. To call out to a Father who had turned away. But Jesus won the fight. Jesus trusted the Father in the moment he could feel him. So I could tell you, Forgiven, now fight on. Forgiven, now fight on. Forgiven, now fight on.

And Jesus fight was not without results. This whole account reminds me of Rocky IV against the Soviet. Because during the match the Russians who previously had booed Rocky, saw his fight, and dogged determinism, and they start chanting his name Rocky, Rocky, Rocky. It's the fight that won the crowd. And Jesus fight on this day won some people. 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. Mark's account recalls how the centurion said, surely this was the son of God.

And this next part is a guess, conjecture, I cannot prove it. But what was it that would have changed a soldier's mind to the identity of this man. Is it perhaps no one else who was crucified, and felt what that was like, the horror and the pain, was able to act and speak like Jesus. Is it perhaps in spite of the pain and anger he could have had against the soldiers, he said, "Father, forgive them." Is it perhaps the compassion he saw when Jesus looked after his mom, and forgave a criminal. Even when he felt all alone and without compassion. Is it perhaps the trust he still saw in the confession of these last words, even in a moment when he was forsaken. It's a guess. But there maybe something to it. The impact of a man who did and said things far better and more noble than what he felt.

Is this perhaps how we too influence the world around us. When regardless of what we feel, we fight to do what is right. Regardless of how mean, nasty, or underhanded, we lead the way in kindness and humility. That regardless of how tired we are, or how many obstacles are in the way, we fight to do the will of God and serve him with our lives. That regardless of how many reasons we have to be down, we fight for what it is to be thankful and give God praise. I think there's truth here. So dear friends fight with me, passed the fake news of emotions, for the glory and the Kingdom of God. Let's get rid of the fake news and get on to the good news of Jesus and his love. Amen.