

# FAITHFUL OR FRETFUL FEET?

Sermon, November 17, 2019

Texts: Habakkuk 3:16-19, Matthew 6:25-34



"You make the gateways  
of the morning and the evening  
shout for joy."  
Psalm 65:8

"The best thing you have in this world is today. Today is your savior; it is often crucified between two thieves, Yesterday and Tomorrow. Most of our misery is left over from yesterday or borrowed from tomorrow. Whoever planned this life of ours did well in giving us one day at a time. Don't let the past unman you, benumb you with remorse, weaken you with self contempt. As for the future, the best preparation for it is an unafraid today. Today is yours. God has given it to you. All your yesterdays He has taken back; all your tomorrows are still in His hands. Today is yours, just a little strip of light between two darkneses.

Use it so that at its close you can say, "I have lived and loved today." -- Frank Crane

The insert entitled "Today" in your bulletins was also printed three other times over my twenty-three years here ... written by Frank Crane, a Presbyterian pastor in the 1920s ... I like to pull it out every eight years or so. After reading this to you, I'm always tempted to just give the benediction ... but I won't.

I've always liked the story about a man driving down the highway in his truck. Every couple of thousand feet he would stop and beat the side of his truck with a big sledgehammer. It was taking him forever to go just a few miles. A man riding in his car behind this truck watched with bemused curiosity as the truck driver would ride and stop, beat the truck, ride and stop again. Finally, the fellow in the car pulled over on one of the stops and asked, "What in the world are you doing?" The truck driver replied, "I have a problem. I have a two ton capacity truck, and I am carrying over four tons of canaries. Unless I keep half of them flying all the time, I am overloaded!" A silly story, but how often are we like that overloaded truck, carrying more of a burden than we are designed to carry? Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading that today has enough burdens of its own. You might say we have a two ton daily carrying capacity, but in addition to the two ton burdens of today, we insist on carrying a ton of regret and guilt from the past and a ton of worry about tomorrow, and that fretful load impedes our progress as we keep stopping along the way in life to beat ourselves up over it. I Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your cares upon Him, for he cares for you." Let me make this paraphrase: Cast your "canaries" upon Him. "All your yesterdays He has taken back; all your tomorrows are still in His hands." Today is ours.

During the Time With the Children, I told of the two animals depicted on the National Emblem of Australia, the Emu and the Kangaroo. They have two characteristics in common, the most obvious is that both are indigenous to the island continent of Australia. The other characteristic is that neither has the physical capacity to walk *backward*. They can only go forward. What a wonderfully inspiring and appropriate symbol for a nation that had its beginnings as a British penal colony! (*New South Wales, in southeast Australia, was founded by the British as a penal colony in 1788. Over the next eighty years, more than 160,000 convicts were transported to Australia from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, in lieu of being given the death penalty. Today, about 20% of Australians are descendants of convicts, including plenty of prominent citizens.*) The National Emblem of Australia depicts an important element of the Christian Gospel, as well. What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ about? The Gospel is certainly about forgiveness. Forgiveness is a fundamental part of the Gospel, but it is **not** the whole of the Gospel. Forgiveness deals with the **past**; but the Gospel is also for the **present** as well as the **future**! The Gospel is about forgiveness for our past; Jesus is Savior. The Gospel is also about **direction** for our present and our future; Jesus is Lord. I once heard it summed up rather concisely this way: "*Don't let your past have a future.*" If something bad happened, learn from your past; make restitution, make apologies, set things right where possible, yes; but *don't* dwell in the past. Don't walk backwards; don't keep going "back there." Don't let the thief of yesterday rob you of peace and joy today. Or, for you "Frozen" fans, as Queen Elsa would sing, "*Let it go! Let it go! Turn away and slam the door! I'm never going back; the past is in the past!*" What works in driving a car also works in life. If you try to drive forward in the car with your eyes constantly on the rear view mirror, it will only lead to more accidents from which you will have to recover. Go forward in the ways our Lord directs, living and loving as He would have you live and love, in the day you have.

"Most of our misery is left over from yesterday or borrowed from tomorrow." The thief named "tomorrow" has another name. He is called "Worry." We don't worry about the same things, and we don't worry to the same extent, but one thing we all have in common is that we all **do** worry. The word "worry" comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word which means "to strangle" (*the related German word for strangle is "würgen"*). Worry is like an invisible hand grasping your throat, or your chest, or your gut, constricting your internal organs, strangling the life out of you. The "thief" of Worry robs

us of our sleep, steals our energy, saps our strength, ruins our concentration, gives us headaches, interferes with our relationships, affects our work, and devastates our health. Worry makes us unable to be decisive, because we are too worried about the "what if's" to do anything (*"the paralysis of analysis"*). Now, there certainly are many things in our lives that give us cause for legitimate concern. Jesus knows that. But He also knows we aren't designed to carry the extra tonnage of worry we are so prone to carry. In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus actually **commands** His followers not to worry. Three times He says in so many words *"Don't worry."* That's a command! Our Psalter reading this morning: *"Do not fret, it leads **only** to evil (37:8)."* Now, if sin can be defined as anything contrary to God's will, then it follows that worrying is a sin. The Bible says, *"All things work together for good for those who love God."* Worry says, *"I don't believe that."* The Bible says, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me;"* worry says, *"Not really."* The Bible says, *"My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus,"* and worry says, *"No, he won't."* The Bible says, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you;"* worry says, *"Yes you will."* At root, worry is doubting God.

*(A quote of Corrie Ten Boom, left out due to time constraints: "Worry is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength – carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time. Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength.")*

Later in Matthew's gospel (chapter 11), Jesus says, in so many words, *"Let me do your worrying for you."* His actual words are, *"Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* **Whatever** trouble we may have, large or small, whatever is causing us to be upset, anxious, worried and fearful, Jesus invites us to bring it to Him. Jesus wants us to come to Him with whatever is burdening us, and to say, *"Lord, I really want to give this to you. I want to be free from the misery of yesterday and the fear of tomorrow in order that I may live and love to the fullest TODAY."* The sort of yoke He refers to is the type that binds one beast of burden to another. One ox has a burden too heavy for it to bear alone, so a yoke joins it with another ox, and together, with their combined strength, they make productive use of the burden they carry; their yoke pulls a plow that eventually enables things to grow and flourish! Sometimes Jesus does miraculously remove burdens from our lives. When He does, it is indeed a cause for great rejoicing. However, more often than not, Jesus does **not** remove our burden ... instead, He yokes Himself to us to help us better handle it *and* to help us use our burden to produce beneficial results. He never promises burden free lives, but He does promise to be with us in the midst of our everyday worries, if we come to Him.

Last Sunday we looked briefly at the prophet Habakkuk's complaints to God and God's response. In so many words, Habakkuk had cried out, *"Where are you, God? We are in trouble, can't You see? Why don't you intervene?"* God gave answer to Habakkuk's complaint, that He *is* going to intervene, but not in a way Habakkuk expects. God says that He will use Babylon, a nation more wicked than the Israelites, to further His purposes. This is a prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity, one of the darkest hours of Jewish history. God continued in so many words, *"In the midst of what is to come, remember: THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH. Go on living by faith, no matter what happens ... trust what I do, trust what I direct, go on living by faith."* After hearing all this, and after realizing all that was about to happen, Habakkuk has a wonderful reply God's not exactly singing, *"Don't worry, be happy."* The news of what is about to happen causes *"decay to enter into my bones,"* Habakkuk heart pounds and he trembles ... much like me as I was stuck on that waterfall cliff I told you about last week. Yet, Habakkuk says, (3:17): *"Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."* Or, to paraphrase for today, *"Though the stock market crashes, though even Amazon should go bankrupt, though the invaders of disease and death enter my home ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."* No matter what happens, he **WILLS** to go on living by faith, he will trust God. That's the kind of resolve God wants. Emus and kangaroos who will go ON, go FORWARD in the day they have, fully trusting Him for direction and for their future.

3:19 -- *"The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."* I've told you before about my high school football coach who told me I ran like a deer, but in the next breath he made clear he was referring to a John Deere tractor. As mentioned earlier, a bit lost in our NIV translation is that the deer Habakkuk refers to is a specific kind of deer, the hind; the hind is indigenous to that area and was known for its sure-footedness in the mountains and high places. Hinds bound up mountainsides, leaping from rock to rock with extraordinary grace and agility, surmounting physical obstacles and the most difficult precipices with apparently effortless ease. What Habakkuk recognized is that God wills to give us these kind of feet, to give us the ability to live and move with grace in the day we have amidst the obstacles and danger-filled precipices of this life which all are cause for worry and concern. As we go on living by faith in the TODAY that we have, trusting in His direction, God develops in us "hind's feet," faithful feet that'll enable us to keep on walking in faith, rather than fretful feet that immobilize and/or cripple us.

The Gospel is about forgiveness for our yesterdays, and the Gospel is also about direction for our todays and tomorrows ... and empowerment to follow that direction, with gracious and worry-free joy, in the day we have.