

Of Icicles and Icebergs

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(Celebration of Pastor Elwood Reitz's 65th anniversary of Ordination & Blessing of Afghan blankets for Safe Harbor)

It was a great week for watching icicles come and go...

Not bicycles! Icicles

They were visible everywhere

Dripping down from stop signs, clothes lines, gutters, and mailboxes

Even the grill and lawn furniture in our backyard

Everywhere we looked, we could see the form of crystal clear daggers

Extending their icy fingers to the ground

Apt complex - massive structure of stalactites hanging off the gutters 50' long/10'

As if the pipes to our organ were inverted

Bending and buckling under the weight

Someone this week spoke of an ice dam in their

Gutters creating a leakage in the kitchen ceiling...

How this massive wall of ice was formed...

One little drip at a time

One drop freezes, and then another runs down it and freezes

And then some more

And so on...

Isn't that a metaphor for how temptation seems to work in our lives?

We are faced with a relatively simple trial or temptation and we succumb to it

Thinking it's no big deal

And then it returns, and it happens again, and again, and a pattern develops

Becomes more and more serious/severe

Until there is a wall of sin formed that seems impossible to break through

An impenetrable wall between us and our loved ones

Jesus knows

THE CONDITIONS INTO WHICH WE WERE BEING SENT

The text tells us that he was tempted continuously in the wilderness, not just on the last of the 40 days

Like a parent who knows the weather conditions outside

And insists that the children wear their boots, and hats and gloves and scarves

Jesus insists that we have someone to call upon as we face temptation

That we, as writer of Ephesians reminds us - in order to face the schemes of the devil

11 Put on the whole armor of God,

belt of truth

the breastplate of righteousness.

the shield of faith,

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,

JESUS FACED TEMPTATION ON OUR BEHALF

AND INVITES YOU TO CALL ON HIM

IN YOUR HOUR OF NEED

Attributed to ML but also seen as Chinese proverb...

Martin Luther explained it this way: "You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." What he meant was that we will always have sinful thoughts, but we can't welcome these thoughts and let them get a foothold in our hearts. If we do, we are feasting on the world instead of feasting on the Word.

Jesus is aware that Christians will continue to be tempted our entire lives

Continue to wrestle with sin

Continue to be

As Pastor Bill reminded us on Wednesday

be tossed about by the sea changes of temptation

Our tendency is to deny the reality before us...

Like the young boy who came home and giving his report card to his father said,

I got an A in Math – but the lousy teacher GAVE ME a C in history.

Ready to take the credit for the A but placing the blame elsewhere for the C

Garden of Eden all over again - Adam points to Eve, Eve to serpent
anything to avoid the painful reality of our condition...

A seminary professor in the Midwest teaches a course on the human condition

He starts the unit, NOT with a lecture, nor readings from a book

He starts with this assignment:

Students in groups of 2 and 3 are sent to local nursing homes.

They are to stay 24 hours. Including overnight.

Many students dislike the assignment.

But it helps bring home the professor's point that:

To be human is to be subject to;

and limited by suffering and pain...even - sin and death.

One of the professor's favorite lines, heard over and over in his lecture's is this:

TO LIVE LIFE REQUIRES EITHER INTENSE SELF DECEPTION

OR DEEP COURAGE.

The devil offers Jesus deception and lies

Jesus reponds with deep courage of resistance

We on the other hand, are not as steadfast...we're famous for

Not taking responsibility...

Rarely do people want to take responsibility.

To own up to reality of conditions around them...

Take for example, this humorous story of a pastor who went to a new call.

When the new pastor arrived, he received a phone call from the previous pastor.

His predecessor told him that in the center drawer of the desk, he had left three envelopes

“I know things can get pretty hard in ministry,” he said, “so I wrote some advice for you in each of the three envelopes. Use them if you are at your wits end.” For the first 6 months things going great – enjoyed typical honeymoon period. But then the heat began to rise and there was a bit of conflict in the church. The pastor decided to go to the desk drawer and open the first envelope. On it was written this advice, ‘If trouble is rising, blame it on me. After all, as your predecessor, I am long gone, and there will be some who will delight in pointing out my short comings.’ So he did that. He blamed his predecessor. And it worked! But only for awhile, and when things got sour again he decided to open the 2nd envelope which read, “Blame the Synod office – after all – they’re big and strong, they can handle it!” That too worked, but only for awhile and when the storm clouds gathered again, in desperation the pastor went to the drawer and opened the third envelope. There he found these words of advice. “It's time for you to: Prepare three envelopes.”

LIVING LIFE REQUIRES EITHER INTENSE SELF DECEPTION

OR DEEP COURAGE.

Strong winds of self-deception and temptation blow around us saying...

Go ahead – blame someone else, it's not your fault

Or have another drink – it will let you escape for awhile

Or pad your resume, no one will find out

Or, sure, tell that little lie to your loved one – they won't figure it out

Or go ahead and make an excuse for continuing a destructive behavior

LIVING LIFE REQUIRES EITHER INTENSE SELF DECEPTION

OR DEEP COURAGE.

It takes deep courage to face up to our faults and confront them

It takes deep courage to rebuild a community from the inside out

It takes deep courage to arrive at the bedside of a dying person and pour out your heart.

It takes deep courage to be faithful to our calling to share Christ's love with the poor in our community

It takes deep courage to serve the Lord 65 years as Shepherd and pastor

Yes, the strong winds of self-deception whirl around us

BUT

We have one who stands strong against those winds

He survived the test in the wilderness, and he stands strong at the right hand of the
Father.

He is the One standing strong beside John the Baptist,

Dripping wet and filled with the Holy spirit

He is the one standing strong among his people at the synagogue in Nazareth

Reading from the book of Isaiah

Announcing its fulfillment in their presence

He is the one standing strong on the mountain with Moses and Elijah

As his followers cower in fear from the radiant light

He is the one standing strong before Pilate

Announcing that His kingdom is not from this world.

He is the one standing strong, though he had been dead,

In the upper room with His followers

Turning their mourning into joy

Jesus is One who stands strong in this world...he invites you to stand with Him...

Travelers in the North Atlantic Ocean have frequently observed icebergs traveling in one direction

Despite the strong, prevailing winds blowing against them in the opposite direction

Although baffling at first, wind blowing this way – iceberg moving that way

The explanation is reasonable: the iceberg, has 9/10ths of its mass underwater

9/10ths of it is submerged in water...so it

Follows the direction – not of the whirling winds

But of the strong current underneath...

And so it is with your faith.

You can stand against the winds of culture that say we must deceive ourselves

You can see life as it truly is – because you have seen God as God is

As One who faced temptation on your behalf

And resisted for your sake...

When you immerse yourselves in these truths

When you are plunged down deep into your baptismal identity

You will find that you get caught up in the strong current of God's love.

HAVING FAITH IN JESUS...

It DOES NOT REQUIRE INTENSE SELF DECEPTION

BUT IT DOES GRANT: DEEP COURAGE.

20 Now to him who is able to accomplish abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory, forever and ever. Amen