

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

August 9, 2015

“Freedom, Faith And God Is Still Speaking”

Ray Hawkins



God
is still
speaking,

Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
Donna Scott: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

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Matthew 23:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Matthew 17:20

He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’

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Faith, Freedom and God Is Still Speaking

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I would like to start off with an age appropriate story. An old German Shepard was walking in the woods one day, and he came upon a pile of bones. While looking at the bones he noticed out of the corner of his eye a panther. So the old German Shepard sat down with his back mostly toward the panther. Now the panther was stalking the old dog, and just as he was going to strike the German Shepard turned and said, “Boy that panther sure tasted good.” Now the panther looked at the bones and was suddenly terrified. He turned and ran. A squirrel was watching all this , and ran after the panther.

When he caught up to the him, he said the old dog fooled you, and I will tell you all about it if you promise not to chase or eat me. So the Panther agreed. When the squirrel was finished the panther was furious, and started to run back to eat the dog. By

this time the German Shepard had sat down by the pile of bones. As the panther was just getting ready to attack the German Shepard said as loud as he could “where is that squirrel. It’s been over an hour since I sent him out to get me another panther.” Well the panther stopped in his tracks, turned terrified and ran off as fast as he could. All this go to show us that “old age and wisdom triumphs over youth and enthusiasm.”

Faith and Freedom. Two things that go together in many ways. We live in a great country that gives us a lot of different freedom’s. We like to say “thank God for the constitution” it gives us freedom of religion. But without faith how can we believe in God? The constitution gives me the freedom to stand up here today and say just about anything I want to say. There is no National Religion, as there is in some other countries. We are not restricted to a particular God that we must believe in. We can proclaim our belief in God and Jesus Christ in any way, at any time we want. We can meet together and praise God and Jesus all we want and have no restrictions put on us by our government. And we “thank God for that Freedom.”

Faith is a little harder to define. As Christians we believe that a young virgin (maiden) was visited by an angel and told to expect a visit from the holy spirit. The angel left and the young girl was overcome with the holy spirit and became with child. We have faith that this story is true. It takes a lot of faith to believe stories like this sometimes. Imagine a young lady, in her teens today, becoming pregnant and telling her parents, friends, and husband to be that she became pregnant by an over whelming spirit. Insisting she was still a virgin. What a story, can we still hear the snickers.

In her time she could have been stoned too death. How far have we come in over 2000 years? She could still be stoned to death in some parts of our world today. She was not stoned because God sent a second angel to talk to Joseph, her husband to be, and explained what happened and who’s child she was carrying. We believe this story because of Faith. We cannot quantify this account of the immaculate conception. Their apparently were no eyewitness to any of this. Can you hear this story today? Breaking news, the Christ child conceived today. Film at 11.

The news media would have stories confirming the conception of the Christ child, and stories about how this could not be true. Experts would be on both sides of the story and of course both would be right.

Moving our faith story forward, we come to Christ as an adult. He has now performed miracles. Healed the sick, tore up a temple, was baptized by John the Baptist. He has thousands of followers, and a whole bunch of enemies. His enemies wanted him dead. So they went to Pilate and asked the Romans to execute him. We know the story. Judas betrayed him to the Romans. Peter betrayed him three times before the cock crowed. The Romans beat him, tortured him and finally nailed him to a cross. A Roman soldier even stuck a spear in his lung to make sure he was dead. He was taken to a cave and buried with a large rock in front of the cave. Three days later Mary went to the cave and found the rock had been moved back. As she entered the cave an angel of the Lord spoke to her. Telling her that Christ has risen, and she is to tell his followers to meet him at a certain time and place.

Now we see Faith in action. She has been asked to believe this thing called an “Angel,” not easy, and deliver a message to others to boot. This must take a leap of faith beyond what we can imagine today. But it gets better. The apostles are asked to believe that Christ is risen and coming to meet them. Now we know Thomas was not that convinced. He wanted to put his hand and fingers in Christ’s wounds. We know that at this time Christ gave us the commandment Love your God. Love others as you love yourself. All of this is believed because we have Faith and the Freedom to believe what we want.

So as members of the United Church of Christ, what are we Free to believe in?

We believe in the Triune God: Creator, Resurrected Christ, the sole head of the church and the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings about the creative and redemptive work of God in the world.

We believe that each person is unique and valuable: It is the will of God that every person belong to a family of Faith where they

have a strong sense of being valued and loved.

We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey: and that each of us is at a different stage of that journey.

We believe that the persistent search for God produces an authentic relationship with God: enduring love, strengthening Faith, dissolving guilt and giving life purpose and direction.

We believe that all of the baptized belong body and soul to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

No matter who – no matter what - no matter where we are on life's journey - notwithstanding race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, class or creed - we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of Faith. All persons baptized - past - present and future - are connected to each other and to God through the sacrament of baptism. We baptize during worship when the community is present because baptism includes the community's promise of 'love, support and care' for the baptized - and we promise that we won't take it back - no matter where your journey leads you.

We believe the UCC is called to be a united and uniting church: "That they may all be one." (John 17:21) "in essentials – unity; in non-essentials – diversity; in all things – charity" These UCC mottos survive because they touch core values deep within us. The UCC has no rigid formulation of doctrine or attachment to creeds or structures. Its overarching creed is love.

UCC pastors and teachers are known for a commitment to excellence, interpretation of the scripture and justice advocacy. Even so, love and unity in the midst of our diversity are our greatest assets.

We believe God calls us to be servants in the service of others: and to be good stewards of the earth's resources. 'To believe is to care; to care is to do.'

We believe that the UCC is called to be a prophetic church: As in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and

comfort the afflicted.

We believe in the power of peace: and work for the nonviolent solutions to local, national and international problems.

We are a people of possibility: In the UCC, members, congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear ... for after all God is still speaking,

So how today is God still speaking? Recently the Pope spoke about taking better care of our environment. He said the Earth is one of God's gifts to us. It was well received until some rich corporations came out and said that it could hurt profits. It's amazing to me that profits (money) are more important than trying to take care of the planet we live on. The Pope also recently came out about divorced people who have remarried, and said they should not be shunned, but accepted into the church. God is still speaking. On a more personal note we have started to distribute food and clothing to those in need. We have let the homeless sleep at our church, some inside and some outside. I feel God was watching over us when our Search and Call committee found Rev. Bill and asked him to be our pastor. I believe the changes we have made are the result of God's will because God is still speaking to us.

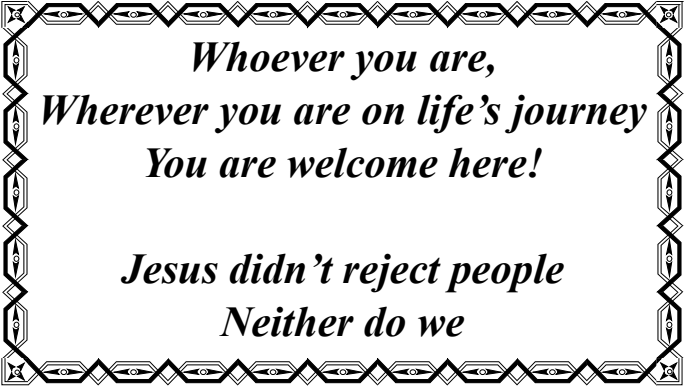
UCC says we should never place a period where God has placed a comma, because God is still speaking.

We can thank God, and our Constitution that we have the Faith and the Freedom to believe and do all of these things.

God is still Speaking, can we hear.

Amen





*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*

THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism