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St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
20th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23) October 11, 2015
Mark 10:17-31

The Ten Boom family were devout Dutch Christians who helped hundreds of Jews escape the Nazi holocaust of WWII. The youngest of the four children, Corrie Ten Boom, chronicled her memories in the best-selling book 'The Hiding Place.'

Located in Corrie's top floor bedroom was a hidden room, which had been designed by a member of the Dutch resistance. The secret room was about the size of a wardrobe closet, and the space could hold up to six people. Countless Jews were spared from persecution by the Nazi's as they were harbored to safety thanks to the selfless acts carried out by the Ten Boom family.

In February of 1944 A Dutch informant led the Nazi soldiers to the Ten Boom home, where the entire family was arrested, and immediately sent to prison. Ten later Corrie's father died, and Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were ultimately sent to the Ravensbruck (Rahvensbrook) concentration camp in Germany. Betsie died in December of that year. (Pause) Before she died she told Corrie "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." (Pause). Corrie was released from the camp 12 days after the death of her sister. She later learned that her release was due to a clerical error. She returned to the Netherlands and opened a rehabilitation house for concentration camp survivors and also the unemployed Dutch who had collaborated with the German during their occupation. She later traveled the world as a public speaker, all the while talking of the power of forgiveness and reconciliation through the power of Christ. Corrie died on April 15, 1983 at the age of eighty-five.

Some might say what Corrie Ten Boom and her family did was unthinkable or risky; while others might say what they did was just plain crazy. I mean...who would put themselves at such great risk and why? After all, the Ten Booms were Christians, and yet they put their lives at risk in an effort to defend and protect the Jews. When one is able to comprehend depth and breadth of the love of Christ, temporal things tend to lose their significance, while spiritual things tend to take on greater value. Allow me to recall Mary Magdalene, labeled a prostitute, put herself at great risk as she was present at the crucifixion of Jesus. Moreover, she later went to the tomb where Jesus' body lay, likely cognizant of the fact that his tomb was being guarded by Roman soldiers. Yet, in spite of the risk she was fearless, and she went anyway. The Ten Booms were fearless and they protected the Jews anyway. And why you may ask would they go to such extremes and for what? Well.....it's really quite simple (pause); they did so solely because of their immense love for Jesus. They chose the better part.

Two very different stories, and two vastly different periods in time, but in the commonality of each story a profound gift was revealed. For Mary Magdalene the gift was Jesus revealing himself to her at the tomb. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary did as Jesus asked, she did not hold on to him, but went she went on to do as he had told her to do, for she knew that his glory would be revealed.

Throughout Corrie Ten Boom's time in the concentration camp, four months of which were in solitary confinement, she was known to be an encourager for others. She illustrates in her book 'The Hiding Place' that though she would sometimes lose courage she was able to regain her strength through prayer and reading scripture. Following her release – throughout

her many speaking engagements at churches and other venues, people would often ask Corrie for words of wisdom or encouragement in dealing with difficulty and adversity. Corrie would often respond, and I quote “You must learn to hold everything loosely...everything.” (Otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open). End quote. Even in the midst of experiencing the emotional and physical pain and adversity of losing loved ones and the imprisonment of a concentration camp, Corrie rested in the assuredness that God was in control, and this allowed her to “hold on loosely to temporal things.” This is an unconventional thought for many of us - myself included.

However, when Jesus walked the earth he tended to do things in a more unconventional sort of way, and this was because he too set his mind on spiritual things, or the things that are unseen. He had a great love for the people and this is evidenced throughout his teachings in the gospels. Yet... some of his teachings were and are perplexing. This is evidenced in today’s gospel reading as Jesus talks to the rich, young ruler. Jesus’ unexpected response causes the man to go away grappling with grief and confusion, as wealth was considered to be blessing in the first century.

To make this issue of wealth even more complex, still today, there are those who promulgate what is referred to as the prosperity gospel, which teaches that God promises wealth and abundance to those who believe in him and follow his laws. However, this theology is incongruent to the teachings of Christ. The Gospel teaches us that Jesus doesn’t make us rich in earthly possessions and power, but he fulfills our greatest need which is not tangible or temporal.

As human beings, we desire a certain degree of predictability. There is simply a sense of safety and security in knowing, and this just makes sense. Yet, ironically, it is when we let go, or

“hold loosely’, that we begin to experience a powerful sense of freedom and joy. I ask you to recall a time that you took a risk, or overcame a fear. What feelings did this occasion evoke? Now, certainly we can find measures of safety and comfort in temporal or earthly things, but, oh, so much more awaits each of us, when we remind ourselves to hold on loosely, while resting in the abundant riches and grace of God. This is so powerfully illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles - as Peter and John approached a man begging for spare change Peter said to the man “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk” and the crippled beggar did indeed begin to walk. (Acts 3:6).

Let us pray. “Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hardwood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your name. Amen.”