

Sept. 29, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: James 5: 13-15; Psalm 103; Luke 10: 17-20

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Against All Odds

I have swum against the current most of my life—it's part of my disposition. And while we're not all risk takers at Peace, I think we do delight in the numerous times in which we've stood up and taken a stand—and stood for something. Gone against the current—against all odds.

There have been a variety of occasions over the years when Rabbi Dan and I have been doing things in public, and people say, '*You shouldn't be about that. Not now. We don't need that.*' And Dan and I occasionally remind folks about the story of David and Goliath.

Who won? That's where the church lives. Who won...against all odds?

Against all odds, we get to be here today. It is miraculous. Did you know that this is not an ordinary day? How many people, 100 years ago, would have bet money that you exist today? (Nobody, 'cuz I'm going to keep my money.)

And that this Community exists. Strange characters, but we exist, and we've got each other—against all odds.

That this Sanctuary is here...Charlene [McPherson]'s husband, John, spent three months going through endless paperwork to apply for a loan from the national Lutheran Church body in Chicago—three months—which the Church in Chicago denied within the first week. '*Nope, not going to give you the loan.*' And Arlene [Reed] said the next week, '*John, I think you should check out my bank*', which John did, and we had the loan secured in two weeks. That's why this [Peace] is here— against all odds.

That the cosmos is here is against all odds. Did you know that? Carl Sagan, that brilliant astrophysicist, said in 1990 that '*Only two things are needed to replicate life on Earth elsewhere in the universe: Water*' (and I forget the other one. Is it light? I don't know.) Around 2000 that was revised, and astrophysicists said, '*Actually, we need 15 things to replicate the Earth and life on it.*' Five years later, they said, '*No, it's 50 things that we need to replicate [life on Earth]*'. Today it's approaching 500 things that have to be in order in order to replicate life on this planet, and the Earth itself. It is against all odds.

And that's what our Scriptures are about today. James says, '*You got troubles?*' [James 5: 13]

Anybody here got troubles? Anybody? Yeah. Anybody been through troubles? Remember those times when you're ready to give up, and there was no hope, and you're being buried alive—and 'what's the point'? And against all odds you're here

today. No, I'm not saying God takes away every pain and solves every problem, but against all the odds, God is always there, working to come through with us.

'Are any of you ill?' James asks. *'You get the elders together and you pray, and you pray, and you pray'* [James 5: 13-14] because God is always at work deep inside of us. We don't always get the outcome we want, but maybe other aspects of what we need are being healed by God, so that we can come into the wholeness and fullness of Life once again—against all odds.

And then James asked, 'Have any of you experienced any blessings? Anybody? Well then, sing and praise and bless and dance. *'Bless the Lord, bless the Lord, my soul.'* [Psalm 103]

Now, listen, I would never in a million years ask you to live in ecstasy all the time. I know that's too much. But people, once every thirty-seven years, would you just let go— and praise and bless and dance? Just once. Inside of it. There is a whole other connection through which God is feeding us, if we let go, just every now and then. And the Psalmist wouldn't feel abandoned like he or she is the only one crying, 'Mercy, Mercy. Bless the Lord. That's all I'm asking, my Friends!' That's all we're asking. Against all the odds, we're here.

Jesus today has a startling vision, *'I saw Satan fall, like lightning.'* [Luke 10:18] This is the pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry. Corruption, evil, deception—all these things are still at work. They're not gone but their power has been broken, Jesus says. And because Satan has fallen, Jerusalem need not fall. And that's why Jesus goes to Jerusalem.

And you may remember that all of his disciples said, *'No, you're not going there. That's crazy, because they're going to kill all of us.'* [Mark 8: 31-33]

Jesus didn't go to Jerusalem to die. This is so strange—Jesus goes to Jerusalem to save Jerusalem, because they need not be destroyed. And he offers them the path of non-violent wisdom, and compassion, and love—because in his vision, Evil is not in control of this Earth. It is not.

Caesar and the Romans are not in control. The Temple authorities are not in control. Corporations, and AI [artificial intelligence], and nuclear holocaust are not in control of this Earth. God is.

But God doesn't control things the way in which we like. We want that manipulation of all the external events, don't we, so that we don't have to feel any pain or any hurt anymore. That's what we want. But God is working in a much, much, much, much, much, much deeper level—at that place of inspiration inside of each of us, where there's hope and possibility and change and transformation, way down deep inside of us, which is why Jesus is always saying the *'kingdom of God'*, the *'kingdom of love'*. The reign of

Love is always here in you, within you, among you. It's here in your hearts, in your hands, on your lips, in your mind.

Look at your hands. Look at your hands. Right now, look at your hands. This is where the reign of Love is. Look at your hands right here. Jesus was begging people to break through. It's here—not out there, some fantasy land, God someday far away, won't to be nice?—it's right here. Right here.

The infinite energy to change is here—against all odds.
The infinite energy to change is here, always present—rarely practiced.
God, the Holy Spirit, calling, sanctifying, enlightening, changing, healing, blessing, opening, possibility, transforming. The Holy Spirit is here—always willing to work with us.

Anybody scared about the future of democracy? Me too.
Remember the vision [Luke 10:18], and then, confront the authorities with truth. Protect the vulnerable—and act with the wisdom and courage you've been given.

Anybody terrified for the future of the Earth?
Remember the vision [Luke 10:18]—corruption, deception has fallen. Not gone, still here, but the power is broken. Confront the authorities with truth. Protect the vulnerable. Act with the wisdom and courage that you've been given—in the small things, in the day-to-day things, in the great things—because God will not save us from ourselves. It's what we want, don't we? And God will not save us from making choices.

God is that catalytic energy to create possibility, and transformation, and hope—but we have to make the choices.

And what will we choose? Transformation or annihilation?
We get to choose—against all odds.

Trust the vision. [Luke 10:18] Bless the Lord; bless the Lord.
There is no way to peace. [Peace is the way.]

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.