

 ***“Sickness, Growing Old and Death”***

**Theme: UnAfraid: Living with Courage and Hope**

Scripture: Scripture: John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:54

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon

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**Family/Community Activity for the week –** Every day is a gift from God! No matter our situation or our age, we can celebrate and give thanks, even when we face challenges and fear. Encourage your family members to choose one day this week where they will be intentionally aware of the world around them. Invite them to use their senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell to soak in God’s presence in the everyday ordinariness of life. When you gather in the evening, ask each person to share God’s gifts in their day. You can draw, make a list or create a collage of what your family experienced. When you feel anxious, review your lists or look at your pictures and thank God for always being present.

**Meditation Moments for Monday, February 19** – Read Isaiah 40:27-31, 46:3-4. Today’s readings likely came from a time when the Israelites were returning to their ruined land after decades in exile. Isaiah 40’s references to “stumbling” and “walking” reflect that the Israelites were weary. But these prophetic texts said God never forgets his own. Israel (and we) could always hope and trust in God, because God has pledged to support us all our lives—and our God never grows tired like we do.

* Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites when Isaiah said, “God ignores my predicament”? Are there areas of your life that feel that way to you right now? In what ways can you reconnect with the Creator who “doesn’t grow tired or weary” of caring for you? What helps you trust God’s promise that “until you turn gray I will support you”? (Would you like to help God support older Christians? You can be in contact with Pastor Karen Wallace who leads our Caring Ministries, karen@fumcdurango.org.
* Isaiah wrote, “His understanding is beyond human reach” (40:28). Our need to control, our challenge with “letting go,” runs into our inability to control time. Even the best health and fitness programs cannot promise to fully halt the aging process. How can really trusting in a God who’s vastly wiser than you are renew your strength by setting you free from the need to try to control life’s uncontrollable realities?

***Prayer****: Lord God, when I’m worn out, you are still full of eternal energy. As I age, you remain the same creative, caring God you’ve always been. Help me learn more and more to trust your timeless love. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 20** – Read Psalm 71:17-19; 92:12-14. We live in a culture that spends vast sums to hide signs of aging and uses phrases like “out to pasture” to describe aging. In Psalm 71:18 we see that before today’s hair coloring or anti-wrinkle creams, people could fear that God would abandon us as we grow older. The psalmist said God doesn’t despise age. God calls us to serve at all ages, and always welcomes our willing hearts.

* Whether you’re 16 or 86, to what extent can you say, “You’ve taught me since my youth, God, and I’m still proclaiming your wondrous deeds!”? What people, from younger siblings or neighbors to grandchildren (or even great-grandchildren), do you have a chance to influence by your example and verbal sharing? Whatever your age, join the psalmist in resolving, “Lord, I will help others remember nothing but your righteous deeds.”
* In what ways have our culture’s constant messages about growing older influenced your spending and behavior? In what ways, even subtly, do signs of age lead you to think less of yourself or other people? Do today’s readings challenge any of your attitudes or actions? What is one way you want to revise your thinking about older people in the light of these Bible texts?

 ***Prayer****: O God, I’m so used to hearing (and saying) things like “too old” or “too green” that it’s a joy to see that the Scriptures, and you, show no age bias. Free me from those biases, too. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 21** – Read Luke 2:25-38. This story of baby Jesus carries a generational message. Here were Mary (probably in her early teens) and Joseph, bringing an infant to the Temple to dedicate to God, and who greets them? Simeon, so old that as soon as he’d seen Jesus he said to God, “Now let your servant go in peace.” Anna is an 84-year-old widow. The young couple didn’t brush the elderly off as out-of-date annoyances, nor did Simeon and Anna scorn the young parents as clearly too young to parent the Messiah.

* Simeon hadn’t let himself become a “cranky old man.” Luke said he “eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel,” even though the mighty Roman army firmly controlled Judea, and Israel’s religious leaders often quarreled and were at times corrupt. How can you nurture a hopeful sense of “eager anticipation” about what God is doing today, through people of many ages and styles?
* We don’t know exactly, but Anna had probably been constantly in the temple for sixty or more years. It might seem a stretch to “worship night and day” (verse 37). How can your time spent worshipping God, praying and studying the Bible shape what you do with the rest of your time? How can you let your worship fill you with the same confidence and eager anticipation that it gave Simeon and Anna?

***Prayer:*** *O God, one of your names in the Bible was “Ancient of Days.” I’m thankful you are the Lord of all my days, from birth through old age. Keep me aware of your presence with me. Amen.*

**Thursday, February 22** – Read 2 Corinthians 4:6-10, 16-18. The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after a painful time, when many Christians in Corinth, biased by a set of false teachers, had turned against him. Later in the letter, he cataloged the many challenges he had faced in carrying out God’s mission. Yet Paul did not let any of that destroy him. In verse 10, he tied his struggles to Jesus’ death, which seemed the worst defeat of all and yet became a victory when he rose from the dead three days later.

* When did you last feel confused, harassed or knocked down? What resources helped you avoid being crushed or depressed? Have you ever seen, in yourself or anyone you know, the truth, “even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day”?
* We often tend to feel shame about the realities of illness or aging. We see them as a sign of weakness or failure. Paul faced those realities and saw them differently. Are there disciplines (such as Bible reading, meditation, prayer) that help you access God’s strength to keep your inner self moving toward victory even when your outer self is breaking down? How has the Bible’s teaching that our eternal life starts now shaped your view of your limitations?

***Prayer****: Lord Jesus, on the days when life feels dark, when nothing seems to go right, help me not to be crushed or destroyed. Remind me always that “the worst thing is never the last thing.” Amen.*

**Friday, February 23** – Read Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, Revelation 21:3-5. From ancient Rome to today, the “ultimate” human threat is, “I will kill you.” Roman officials puzzled over how little that threat seemed to affect Jesus’ followers. Jesus, who died and rose again, set his followers free from even the fear of death. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul boldly proclaimed a divine victory so sweeping that death would be “swallowed up.” In John Wesley’s sermon “On the Resurrection of the Dead,” he quoted Paul and said, “Let this especially fortify us against the fear of death: It is now disarmed and can do us no hurt.” The Bible ended with Revelation’s glorious vision of a world in which “death will be no more.”

* Jesus faced and defeated evil and death at their very worst. Early Christians staked their lives on the truth of Jesus’ victory over death. In what ways does fear of death subtly shape your life choices? How can Jesus’ death and resurrection set you free from that fear?
* When someone we love faces death, we often use “combat” language, sadly saying things like “she lost the battle.” But Paul quoted the prophet Hosea to deny that death “wins”: “Where is your victory, Death?” For a Christian, death is not a defeat, but a transition into a new phase of our victorious walk with Christ. Does the idea of death cause you fear and anxiety? How can internalizing the full meaning of Jesus' resurrection lead you toward greater peace as you await God’s eternity, where death will be no more?

***Prayer:*** *Lord Jesus, you went where most of us dread going—the realm of death—and you emerged victorious! You offer me the choice to join you in that victory. I accept your offer of a life that lies beyond the power of death. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 24** – Read Psalm 111:7-10, Proverbs 2:2-6, 2 Corinthians 7:1. This sermon series has called us to live above and beyond many of our most common fears. We’ve learned human therapeutic tools that work along with our trust in God to point us toward an unafraid life. There is one kind of “fear,” however, that the Bible fully endorsed: “the fear of the Lord.” Proverbs 3:6-7 gave a concise definition of the life-giving kind of “fear” today’s readings called us to: “Know him in all your paths and he will keep your ways straight. Don’t consider yourself wise. Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”

* “While we tend to associate the word ‘fear’ with a ‘hair standing on end’ or ‘fight or flight’ feeling, ‘the fear of the LORD’ is better understood as reverent awe. Indeed, the Lord is ‘fearsome,’ but not in the sense that some want to run away from or escape from God’s presence. Rather, we are called to approach the Lord with a sense of awe while in the presence of the holy.” Can you recall times when you have experienced this healthy, lifegiving kind of fear in a particularly vivid way? Why would this type of fear cause you to want to draw closer to God, rather than to shrink away?

***Prayer:*** *O God, let me never to lose the sense of awe at the privilege you offer me to accept your love and to walk through my life in your presence, with you as my Lord and guide. Amen.*