

THAT SINKING FEELING

One hundred years ago,..... Dorothy Stucky was born.
She was born in January, in Kansas, and is in good health, residing in a nursing home there.
Dorothy is a delightful and enlightened lady.

When I started at the church in Moundridge, Kansas, she was the office administrator. She was 86 years old at the time, and she continued for two more years.
She was extremely beneficial in helping me adjust as the new pastor.
Dorothy knew the church, the system and the people, and graciously assisted me through my transition.
We quickly developed a mutual respect and trust.

One hundred years ago, today, the largest and safest ship ever built, at that time, the ocean liner, Titanic sank.
She disappeared under the cold Atlantic at 2:20 am, two hours and 40 minutes after colliding with an iceberg. -- 1496 people died.

We all know about the Titanic. Even before the 1997 movie and the discovery of the wreckage in 1985, the sinking of the titanic was embedded in the minds of most everyone, since 1912.
The impact of that tragedy is so significant that rarely is the word "titanic" used, except in reference to THE shipwreck.
Moreover, the word now also has the implied meaning of a bold promise exposed as empty hype.
> The unsinkable sank. <

This past week, I read the sermon that the famous theologian Karl Barth delivered the Sunday right after the sinking of the Titanic.
I was surprised at how quickly the blame had been determined and projected.

Barth pointed the finger at the captain and the ships owners, noting that they intentionally cruised at full speed through iceberg laden waters in order to break the record for the quickest crossing of the Atlantic.

In Barth's words: "If it succeeded, the reputation of the shipping company...would soar, and more importantly, so would its shares."

Did they believe the ship was really unsinkable as promoted to the public, or were the owners needlessly wreckless because of greed?

Karl Barth believes the captain and owners disregarded the concern for the passengers in order to make more money.

Again quoting Barth, and this was said on Sunday, April 20, 1912:

“The captain did not just have the safety of his passengers to think about, but also, and principally, the commission he had been given by the shareholders who were employing him, to break that speed record ... on the ship's first voyage.”

He continues, “Indeed, this catastrophe is a crude but all-the-more clear example to us of the essential characteristics and the effects of capitalism, which consists in a few individuals competing with each other at the expense of everyone else in a mad and foolish race for profits.”

Barth rightly asserts that the disaster is more than just the loss of life.

The lasting horror is because of the breach of trust.

They were told that they were safe—no need to fear.

For 100 years the Titanic is remembered, not because of the significant amount of deaths, but because it was a betrayal of trust.

More people died in the 1917 Halifax explosion— 1,950 to be exact.

1800 were killed when the Mississippi Steamboat caught fire in 1865.

And, do you remember the Dona Paz?

4,375 souls were lost when the Philippine ferry sank in 1987.

Titanic represents betrayal, and our world becomes very dangerous when trust is broken.

I think discovering that our trust is misplaced is one of our biggest fears.

We need to feel safe and secure.

We Really don't like it when a scratch of doubt happens to what we believe is reliable.

In fact, we get uneasy, even upset if something causes suspicion in any pillar of our fortress.

We want / need to think that we can depend on the things we trust.

Doubt can make us afraid,... very lonely, and vulnerable.

We'd rather not hear about cancer, especially if the person is our own age.

When a couple goes through divorce, married friends and acquaintances often pull away from them.... because the divorce creates thoughts of “what if” or “ It can happen to anyone”, and the realization that marriage is not an absolute permanent situation.

We don't want to hear the nurse tell us about the 10% chance of an ugly outcome from the surgery we are about to have.

And, we don't want to hear about a house burning down because of some discarded oily rags.

We want to feel safe. We want to rely on the assumed outcome.

We want the people we trust to be trustworthy.

We don't like to be betrayed, surprised..... or venture into the unknown.

Uncertainty renders a “sinking feeling”..... a sense of lostness and pending danger. It is a perceived threat to our security and safety.

A very significant lesson that came from the Titanic sinking is that businesses will no longer make bold claims about their product or service, unless it's for the military.

No airline company will assert that their planes will never crash.
Even though air travel has a very high safety record, complete certainty is never postulated. Still, it seems the odds are good enough to trust in.
Air travel doesn't feel threatening..... to most people....

However, the odds of being killed by a terrorist are even less, yet.... it was/is a major concern..... because terrorism is threatening.

We don't care for that "Sinking feeling" / of living with threats and uncertainty.
And, there is a primal instinct to run away or to fight back—to overwhelm and defeat the threat.

People will do a lot of running..... and a great deal of killing and destruction in order to try to end a threat.

We want to believe that we are not threatened.

Motivated by fear,..... humans have expended a great deal of energy and resources attempting to wipe out perceived threats, including nature and each other.

Our reflexive action is to kill the pests/ destroy the threats.

We want certainty. We want to control the outcome.
We want to trust that our world will not sink when the next iceberg comes our way.
So, we also try to build thicker skin as we seek to terminate the icebergs,... symbolically speaking.

Yet,..... maybe there is another way..... a better way?

Because,..... the unsinkable Titanic did sink.
Life is full of icebergs.... Surprise and bad things will happen, and others will disappoint us, too. We can't control life.
No amount of effort can guarantee that we will conquer all that comes our way.
A ship with an impenetrable hull..... would be too heavy and sink anyways.

The believers in the early church discovered the "other way."
They trusted each other. They relied on each other and God to get them through.
As the Acts passage reveals, they lived in a commune style.
I can't say "communism" because like the word Titanic, history has redefined that work.
But, in the true and simple meaning of the word the early church practised communion.

A more palatable description would be they had a community of mutual sharing and trust.

Instead of building thick defensive walls, instead of running and instead of violence as a response to their threats,... and they were threatened, they found comfort and safety by investing in each other.... to get through the hazards of life.

To be sure, it wasn't easy.
Calm waters and smooth sailing is an illusion.

The early Christians continued to struggle. They were threatened; they were persecuted, yet the church grew and spread. Their way caught on.

Still it was not easy.
A number of years after the book of Acts was written, the Gospel of John was written,... in part to give reassurances to the persecuted Christians.
They had their doubts, and needed to be reminded about the "other way" of living / the Christ like way / the way of true salvation.

Likely gathered from stories passed down over the years, the John passage presents the episode / the situation after Jesus' death and resurrection.

It was Easter Sunday evening, and the disciples had fled to a safe house to hide out. They ran away. They were afraid of their fellow Jews. They couldn't trust their own kind, and they likely felt a bit betrayed by Jesus.
Jesus had proclaimed a lot of wonderful promises and ideals, yet.... he was killed. Sure, they'd heard he was alive again, but..... so what.
He didn't defeat the threats when he was living before, so why should they believe all would be well, now.....

Jesus appeared to them. Through their illusion of a safe, locked up room, Jesus appeared.

Hideouts, secure locks and iceberg proof walls are meaningless to the ways of Christ.

Jesus proved to them who he was, even to doubting Thomas, a few days later.
And, that exchange was for all those who live after the ascension. It was a way of saying, "Touching nail pierced hands is no longer an option, so learn to trust the testimonies..... and the Holy Spirit."

Jesus presented himself, and repeatedly said, "Peace be with you."

Peace..... be with you.
Peace be with you.

Peace is wholeness,..... and peace includes a sense of completeness, ... of well being.

Is it possible to live in the midst of threats / of dangers and betrayals, and still have peace?

Was Jesus suggesting..... that we can feel safe and secure in the midst of uncertainty--while icebergs float around us?

Did Jesus imply that we have peace in chaos, and not the sinking feeling?

In addition, Jesus poured out his passion / his Spirit to them, and directed them in the way of living in that peace / of retaining that peace.

He told them to be gracious. That they had the power to forgive others... or to Not to forgive others. How we respond to threats is our choice.

I believe the way of peace / the way of living as God intended is to grant grace to others and to ourselves.

We do not conquer. Jesus did not defeat his enemies, but instead he lived on.

Life is not easy, and there will be calamities and enemies, and if we really can't run fast enough or destroy all the threats,..... perhaps our hope is in not becoming what threatens us.

I think forgiveness / grace is the way of being that proclaims,... "I will not keep or own that which threatens, harms and kills."

Moreover, "Peace be with you" must also include how we regard each other and God's creation. We live in God's world, not against it.

The world has icebergs, and if we learn to slow down, we can dodge the icebergs and get through the ordeal.

What's all this have to do with Dorothy Stucky, except in being an nice anecdotal story of someone who was born the same year as the Titanic?

Everything!

Dorothy invested in me / trusted me, and I trusted her, too.

Through that trust, I learned to slow down and listen.

She was 86 after all, and at a different pace than I was.

Yet,..... in order to survive, I needed to learn the world I was living in, and she was the right person for me at the right time.

Ships sink by going too fast, all alone, in the dark.

We need to trust each other.

We need to slow down be in the world that embraces us, and we need the light that God provides..... to show us the way.

Peace be with you.

May Christ be with you, and may you discover that Christ comes to you and through others.