

I Know We Can

Sermon

July 13, 2014

Philippians 4:4-13

⁴ Rejoice^[a] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[b] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved,^[c] whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[d] these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ I rejoice^[e] in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.^[f] ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Let's Pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable you Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

This morning is the beginning of a new four week sermon series called, “WITNESS”.

For the next four weeks each one of the Clergy will be telling their personal faith stories of how we came to give our lives to Christ and answer our call to ministry.

Today you get to hear my faith story.

We all have a faith story.

Some people may say, “I don’t have a faith story.”

But they do. God is active in all of our lives.

It is not something we think about very often, but if we did, we would see how God has been active in our lives.

How God is connected to us and how God has brought different individuals in our lives that we have connected to.

Knowing our story is important because it connects us with God and it connects us to others.

It shapes us and helps us to know who we are and how we are all a part of the family of God.

John Wesley, our founding father of Methodism, believes God’s grace is found in many ways.

He talks about Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace and Sanctifying Grace.

This is how John Wesley saw God working in people’s lives – how they experienced God.

We talk about Wesley’s thoughts on grace in Confirmation class.

You will see these weaved into my story.

Prevenient Grace is the love and grace that goes before us – before we even know about God.

It is God working in our lives before we realize it or recognize it.

I truly believe that God has been with me from the day I was born- guiding me, helping me along my life journey.

I had a rough start from the very beginning.

I was born in the early 1960's two months early.

I was around 32 weeks old.

I was born breech with a double hernia and two dislocated hips.

I only weighed 2.5 pounds.

Over the next few days, I dropped to 1.14.

They really didn't think I was going to survive.

Survival rates back then for babies born this early was very low.

I was taken by care flight to a specialty hospital.

It was 2 ½ hours from my home by car.

My parents were only able to see me on the weekends.

I was there for about two months – from October to December - and finally was able to go home when I weighed 5 pounds – just in time for Christmas.

God was active through a lot of individuals in my first two months of life.

There were many doctors and nurses that helped me during this time in my life.

There were nuns that volunteered in the neonatal ICU.

These nuns held me, rocked me, and took care of me while I was in the hospital.

Each time my Dad came home from visiting me in the hospital my sister (who was 12 years old at the time) would ask him how I was doing – and each time he would reply by saying to

her – “You still have a sister.”

I was called the miracle baby.

Many were not sure if I was even going to make it.

But I did.

Even when I was little, people would tell my parents that I had an “I can” attitude.

After all, I had no idea that I wasn’t supposed to survive.

But I also know I couldn’t have survived without the various individuals that used their gifts

and talents to help me.

They too had “I can” attitudes.

The next battle I faced were my hips.

I was put in a body cast from my stomach down for a couple of years – until the day I started

walking with it on.

My parents called the doctor and he said, *“We weren’t sure if she was going to be able to walk – let alone in the cast. But, she is one determined girl. If she is walking then we need to*

get that cast off of her.”

I was then put in a hip brace that I wore for a few years until I started school.

Then the hip brace came off and I never needed it again.

What I didn't realize until later in life was that one of the best orthopedic surgeons in the Chicago area lived in my hometown.

He was the one that got the phone call about my situation and was the one that that was willing to use his skills and expertise so I could walk.

There are many people that have been in and out of our lives that have helped us in some way and have shown us God's love by the way they gave through loving service.

He was one of those people.

My parents and siblings always told me that I was the happiest baby that they had ever seen and that I had an "I can" attitude.

I guess somehow I knew even back then Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Maybe that is because I had many people in my first few years of my life cheering me on with their "I can" attitudes and helping me along the way.

One of my favorite stories as a child was The Little Engine that Could.

My Dad would tell me that story often and my Aunt had the book.

I would read it every time I was over at her house.

In the story, a long train must be pulled over a high mountain.

Larger engines, are asked to pull the train; but for various reasons they refuse.

The request is sent to a small engine, who agrees to try.

The engine succeeds in pulling the train over the mountain while repeating its motto: "I-think-I-can, I think I can I think I can." - too finally, "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could."

That little story stayed with me for years.

Every time, I had to do something that I was unsure of or afraid to do - I found myself saying I think I can, I think I can...

That story had a big impact on me growing up.

It helped in still in me an "I can" attitude.

My family and I didn't really go to church very often while I was growing up. In fact, the only time I remember going to church was on Christmas.

However, church traditions were very important to my parents.

I was baptized when I was a year old and I also went through Confirmation class when I was in 7th grade.

Confirmation class was really my entry into the church.

I remember being confirmed. There were about 20 of us in class.

On our Confirmation Day, we wore white gowns.

We all stood up front by the prayer railings and answered questions about whether we believed in God the father, in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, if we wish to receive and profess the Christian Faith...Answering those belief questions had a deep impact on me.

I truly felt that was the moment I accepted Christ as my Savior – when I knew I wanted to
live my life for Jesus.

After Confirmation class was over, I joined the youth choir. We met every Wednesday night.

I quickly became good friends with our Pastor's daughters who were both around my age.

They invited me to youth group and to the church wide dinners.

So every Wednesday, I went to church at 5:00 for dinner, then to choir practice and youth
group.

When I was a junior in High school we moved to another town.

We stopped going to church, except for Christmas.

However, those Wednesday nights stayed with me and God continued working on me and
calling me back to church.

When I was 23 years old I moved from Illinois to Florida.

I wanted to get away from family, live on my own and try to figure out what I wanted to do
with my life.

I began feeling lonely, empty.

I was driving down the street late one night when I spotted something that looked very
familiar to me.

It was a United Methodist cross and flame.

I pulled into the church parking lot and sat there for a long time.

It had been 6 years since I had been in church.

I began thinking that maybe what I was missing from my life was Jesus.

So, I decided to go to church that Sunday.

Well over the next few months, the Associate pastor of that church stopped by my house to visit me, he called me, and he even stopped by my place of employment.

He was bound and determined to tell me that God wants to have a relationship with me.

I did not want to listen to him. I was agitated that he kept bothering me.

I am not sure why.

I think I was scared to make a commitment.

I was afraid of what my friends would think of me.

They didn't go to church.

Finally one day he called me.

He invited me to a young adult's dinner at the church. I lied and told him I had other plans.

Then he said something I will never forget. "Karen, we will never give up on you. God loves you very much."

It was at that moment I knew I wanted to re-establish my relationship with Jesus.

At that moment I made the choice to say Yes to God. Yes, God I love you too. Yes, God I do want to have a relationship with you too.

Justifying Grace is the moment that you realize that God loves you and you decide if you want to accept that love and be in relationship.

This is the Justifying Grace that John Wesley was talking about.

I joined the church the following Sunday and got very involved in the life of the church.

I was in the choir, the bell choir, I taught 5th grade Sunday school, helped with the Youth Group, joined the Young Adult Group and was a member on the Church Council.

Since that time, I have always gone to church and stayed active growing in my faith.

That Pastor didn't realize the impact he was making on me spiritually at the time.

He was just being faithful to God and inviting others to be a part of the faith journey.

Because of his willingness to reach out and connect with me, I was able to re-connect with God and with the church.

I left Florida a few years later to attend college so I could become an Elementary school teacher.

I met Scott while I was in college. We dated for four years before we got married.

While I was pregnant with our third child, I felt God calling me into ministry.

I gave God every reason why I should not go into the ministry.

I am shy, and quiet.

I did not grow up in the church.

I had two small children and I was expecting a third child.

I needed to take care of my husband and children.

Then, I went on a Walk to Emmaus – which is a Spiritual Life Retreat.

One night we had a chance to stay in the chapel and pray.

If we wanted to talk to a clergy, we just needed to raise our hand.

Well as I was praying, I told God that calling me in the ordained ministry was absolutely
ridiculous.

I was going to put an end to it right here and right now.

So I raised my hand for a clergy to come and talk to me.

I knew a clergy person would tell me that I was right.

After all I was pregnant, and not only that, but I had two small children.

Well a clergy person saw me raise my hand and started over.

I looked up for a moment and saw who it was.

Right away I started praying again and saying,

“No God. Not that person. I want another Clergy.”

No sooner did I say that when that minister said,

“Can I help you? Do you want to talk?”

At that point I gave up, because God had given me my answer without the minister saying a
word.

You see, the minister was a female who was also pregnant and had two small children at
home.

I knew the answer was yes.

Yes, God was calling me to be a minister.

Sanctifying grace is God’s action in your life to help you grow in perfect love. To love like God
loves.

Max Lucado once said, “God loves you just the way you are, but God doesn’t want to leave you that way.”

This is what John Wesley meant in regards to sanctifying grace.

God wants to help us grow so we can love God and love people in perfect love – to love unconditionally and completely.

I knew it was going to be hard to go to seminary, raise a family and work part-time in a church. I wasn’t sure how I was going to do all of it, but I was reminded often of Philippians

4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

I started seminary 6 months after Michael was born.

It took me four years to get through seminary.

I served at the First UMC in Keller, Texas for seven years as the Director of Children’s Ministries, Pre-School Music Director, Director of Christian Education, Minister of Caring, and as the Associate Pastor.

The first sermon I gave was on Vacation Bible School Sunday in 2000.

I was the Children’s Director and I was in seminary.

Our Senior Pastor asked me to preach.

I never, ever saw myself as a preacher.

I wanted to go into ministry, but I only wanted to serve, not preach.

But, God had other plans.

Our theme for VBS that year was “Club Can Do” based off of Philippians 4:13 – *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

I remember thinking right before I went to the podium to preach - I can still make a run for it!

But then I remembered the scripture verse.

I didn't think it would look good for the preacher to run out of the sanctuary screaming – I

CAN'T do this – when the scripture verse is on how we can do all things through Christ.

So right before I preached I said a little prayer that I still say even today before I preach. That

little prayer is this – Let's do this!

The prayer reminds me that I don't preach alone.

God is right there with me and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Over the years I have found that to be true - I can do all things through Christ who
strengthens me.

I know God is with me in all I do.

God is with you too.

As Christians, we all should be “can do” people – willing to help out wherever we can and
sharing God's love with others.

For Christ goes with us and helps us in all things.

Our closing hymn is one that I learned when I was in youth group.

It is called, Pass It On.

As we sing it, think about your faith story.

God's love and grace has been with each one of us through-out our lives.

We all have a part in God's story.

Just like the doctors, nurses, nuns, and pastors that have been a part of my life – through God

we “can do” things together.

God works through you and God works through me.

We are all connected.

When we are the people God calls us to be – others will experience God through us.

We can become the people God wants us to be – and as we share God's love with others –

that builds our faith story and theirs.

We all have a faith story.

Knowing our story is important because it connects us with God and it also connects us with

others.

It shapes us and helps us to know who we are and how we are all a part of the family of God.

Amen.