



“Fear Not, Little Flock”

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, August 10-11, 2019

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Status Quo. You know what that means, right? “The existing condition or state of affairs” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Or, as we might say in everyday English: Keeping things the same; unchanging.

Status Quo is also the name of a document, dating from 1757, between six branches of Christianity, concerning sites in both Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It came about *from a decree of Ottoman Sultan Osman III . . . that preserved the division of ownership and responsibilities of various important sites . . . and represented agreements . . . that nothing could be changed from the way it was without upsetting the balance of order.* (Wikipedia, “Status quo of the Holy Land site.”) It was reaffirmed in 1852 & 1853 and has been in effect since.

The six branches of Christians it concerns are: the Greek Orthodox; Armenian Apostolic; Roman Catholic; Coptic Orthodox; Syriac Orthodox; and Ethiopian Orthodox.

While the intention behind it appears to be a good ideal - hold the peace - the **reality** is that these believers in Christ Jesus simply **cannot** get along. They hold onto **their** way of doing things. And their way is, of course, the only true and **right** way. (Good thing that Lutherans aren't like that).

As example, are you familiar with *The Immovable Ladder at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher* (the burial place of Jesus)? There is a ladder that has been in the same place, on the same ledge, on the outside of the church building, since *at least* 1757. There is a railing built around it so no one can get to it. None of the groups are certain who put it there, or why. All they know is that **none** of the six church branches that have access to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are allowed to touch it. That is, in accordance to the agreement of the Status Quo, they are **not** allowed to move the ladder. So, there it sits, unmoving, on a ledge, as a wonderful, visible example to the **entire** world about how Christian cannot get along with each other.

Status Quo.

The Status Quo of Jerusalem means Nothing. Ever. Changes.

Is that what faith calls us to? Never Changing Anything? Keeping *everything* **absolutely** the

same? Even when no one can no longer remember **why** we're doing something? Or when whatever it is we're doing no longer is achieving any **good**?

In our Hebrews reading, we are given the example of Abraham and Sarah. You hopefully remember that story. It happened way back in Genesis 12. They were chosen by the Lord God Almighty to leave their homeland, walk 300 plus miles westward, to a place they had probably never heard of, in order to start a new life. God called them to pull up stakes, gather their livestock, get all their employees, everything they owned, leave *all* they have ever known, and go someplace different. God called them to a new venture, to build something new. Were they afraid? Probably. Yet they responded . . . in faith.

And how does the author say that Abraham responded?

⁸**By faith** Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance . . .

⁹**By faith** he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents . . .

¹¹**By faith** he received power of procreation, even though he was too old -- and Sarah herself was barren -- because he considered him faithful who had promised. (Hebrews 11: 8-9, 11)

And what is faith?

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

Did you pay attention to what Jesus said about faith to the disciples? Sell everything you own. Give the money to the poor. Get ready for *action*. And always be on the alert, because you never know what is going to happen. In the midst of all that change, upheaval and preparedness, Jesus tells them: Don't. Be. Afraid.

Do not be afraid, little flock, says Jesus.

Yet how can we **not** be afraid, in this day, in this country, when we can't even safely go grocery shopping? How do we **not** fear, when all we're trying to do is have a nice evening out with friends or loved ones and someone with a grudge opens fire? How are we supposed to **not** be afraid, if we can't even celebrate the latest *harvest* in safety, without worrying if a "really angry" individual will show up?

Last week, our entire *country* had our faith shaken, **again**, because of shootings in Gilroy, El Paso, & Dayton. Murderous outpourings by misguided individuals and warped ideologies, have **again** caused hurt, anger, and loss of life. Children have become orphans; families have lost care givers; society has been deprived of productive citizens, simply because someone has a distorted view of what a **human being** truly is.

Even so, Jesus tells the disciples, and therefore tells us: Rock the status quo. Shake things up. Be like Abraham & Sarah: step out in faith. *Don't* be afraid.

Change is part of life. We're born. We grow. We learn to walk, to talk, to feed ourselves, to express our thoughts and our emotions. We learn how to love, and, we learn how to be afraid. We expand our minds, and our experiences. We can't do that with a *Status Quo*.

Change can be scary, because it **is** new, or different. And that's part of the reason why we're often *afraid* of change. Yet do you know what happens when we **don't** change, when we **don't** strive to make things better? What happens when we strive to maintain the *Status Quo*? Without change, you know what happens?

Nothing.

Nothing grows.

Nothing changes.

Everything. Is always. The same.

And then, we die.

John Steinbeck one time wrote:

A dying people tolerates the present, rejects the future and finds its satisfactions in past greatness and half remembered glory.

John Steinbeck, *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction* (Penguin, 2003).

That's what the Status Quo is: living in the past.

Faith is not calling us to live in the *past*. Our faith needs to constantly be growing; Changing. Jesus tells us not to be afraid. Hebrews tells us to embrace the change from God.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Amen.

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