

Uncomfortable Faith: Uncomfortable Truths

John 14:1-7

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Rev. Dr. Patrick Schultz

Good morning. This Sunday we find ourselves in the 4th week of this sermon series: Uncomfortable Faith.

The author of a book I'm reading asks the question, "Instead of a la carte Christianity driven by fickle tastes and "dream church" appetites, what if we learned to love churches even when – or perhaps because – they challenge us and stretch us out of our comfort zones? Instead of driving twenty miles away to attend a church that "fit's my needs," what if we committed to the nearest nonheretical, Bible-believing church where we could grow and serve – where Jesus is the hero – however uncomfortable it might be?" (McCracken, Uncomfortable Faith, 23)

Even that is easier said than done. There is still a significant amount of discernment that goes into finding that church. However, a main criteria in the search moves from "how it fits me" to "what I can give to the church and how I can serve in Christ's name"

Imagine if God had bailed on Israel at the first sign of complaint ~ or the minute they did or said something offensive and began to shop around for a new people to be the chosen people ~ the Canaanites, Philistines or Egyptians) What would life be like for us, if God were as fickle and restless as we are.

But God isn't. God's covenant faithfulness to his people, even when the relationship is difficult and embarrassing should be a learning opportunity for us.

A healthy relationship with our church is like a healthy marriage: it only works when both are grounded in selfless commitment and placing the other first.

Yesterday I had the distinct pleasure of marrying Brett Sheldon and Abbey Perronne (now Abbey Sheldon) and through all of our pre-marriage meetings and even and especially yesterday on the wedding day ~ there was a retelling of how they had put the other first, and a commitment to continue to do so. In fact, they wove that into their wedding vows made to one another.

In terms of our own relationship with church, this sounds kind of uncomfortable, disconcerting and stretching doesn't it? Putting the church first and what I need from a church second? It does. But that's the point of this sermon series – Uncomfortable Faith.

Over the last few weeks we've talked about Embracing the Discomfort; the Uncomfortable Cross, and last week Uncomfortable Holiness. Today I want to talk about *Uncomfortable Truths*.

Without a doubt many would find Jesus appealing, but are turned off by Christianity as system of beliefs because some of those beliefs are just too hard to bear. There are some parts of the Bible we wish weren't there.

This discomfort isn't new to our contemporary day and time; we see that even in Jesus time ~ when he was teaching and preaching there were many who found it uncomfortable – to difficult – to continue to follow him.

John 6:60 tells us of the disciples who heard the teachings of Jesus Christ, “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept

it?” And then in vs 66 “Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.”

When the teaching became too difficult to understand, or follow, or accept, or to conceive of changing how they live their lives it was easier to turn away and no longer follow him.

There is not enough time to list all of the “Uncomfortable truths” we would find in our bible, nor is there time to fully explain in depth those I do want to touch on. So this will be an example or sample of some of the biblical truths that have been and continue to be stumbling blocks for people inside of and outside Christianity. The first is the supernatural.

The truth is that the supernatural is inescapably interwoven with the story of Christianity. Part of our belief is that God created everything; God is omnipotent and can do anything and we see this with God’s interventions in the natural order of things:

A massive flood from 40 days and 40 nights of rain, that wipes out life, except that which is on a large ark.

Causing the sea or rivers to part and dry up allowing the Israelites to pass through unimpeded.

Turning water into wine or blood.

That’s just touching the tip of the iceberg!

There's mystery food from the sky (manna) and water from a rock

Arron's staff turning into a snake and back into a staff and later blossoming and producing almonds.

Making the sun stand still straight over head for longer than 24 hours.

Three men surviving a blazing fire in Daniel.

A man surviving being swallowed by a giant fish in Jonah.

A man having a conversation with a talking donkey.

Mary, a virgin, giving birth to the Son of God.

Jesus healing blind, deaf, lame and leprous people.

Jesus walking on water.

Jesus turning a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish into enough food to feed 5000.

Jesus raising people from the dead.

Jesus being raised from the dead after three days.

Wow! And this is just a small sampling! It seems like these would be more at home in a Harry Potter novel than a religious text taken seriously by billions of 21st century people.

How do we as Christians explain these miracles to a skeptical, non-believer? Would we even try? Wouldn't that be kind of uncomfortable? But miracles are an essential part of Christianity. Without the resurrection there would be no Christianity. Get rid of the supernatural and you get rid of Christianity. If there is no supernatural God, no resurrection, no Holy Spirit, there is nothing.

Russel Moore said, *“The Christian message isn’t burdened down by the miraculous. It’s inextricably linked to it. A woman conceives. The lame walk, the blind see. A dead man is resurrected, ascends to heaven, and sends the Spirit.”*

Perhaps the greatest challenge or contributor to discomfort for us when talking about supernatural and Christianity is the barrier of faith. It confronts the pride of people because it puts limits on what we can know or understand. This is uncomfortable for everyone.

Even though God gave each of us the capability to reason, which can enhance our experience with God, our minds are still limited in its capacity to fully understand certain concepts (eternity, Holy Trinity, Incarnation, Grace) Those must be believe in through faith.

Another biblical truth that can be uncomfortable for people is Christianity’s Exclusivity and God’s Wrath. John wrote this of Jesus saying, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

In a world where multiple roads supposedly lead to heaven, a “Jesus is the only way” approach is inconceivable. One reason Christ’s exclusive claim doesn’t sit well with us is that we don’t like the implications for our friends and neighbors of other faiths, let alone people on the others side of the world who – simply by virtue of where they were born – have never heard the gospel.

Rachel Held Evans, while in middle school, wrote a report after reading The Diary of Anne Frank. Since Anne was Jewish and had not accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior, did that mean she was burning in hell beside the Nazi?

She went on to say: “In Sunday School, they always make hell out to be a place for people like Hitler, not a place for his victims. But if my Sunday school teachers

and college professors were right, then hell will be populated not only by people like Hitler and Stalin, Hussein and Milosevic but by the people they persecuted.”

Evans goes on to say, “If salvation is available to only Christians, then the gospel isn’t good news at all. For most of the human race, it is terrible news.”

This is an uncomfortable truth because it directly confronts our sense of justice and compassion. We struggle with the idea that only a select group will be inheritors of God’s kingdom.

Richard Dawkins, a critic, wrote a piece asking about God’s tendency in the OT to command genocide against non-Israelites. In Deuteronomy God calls for his people to utterly destroy the Canaanites. In Joshua the conquest of Jericho includes the slaughter of more than just enemy soldiers (it includes men and women, young and old).

In 1 Samuel God tells Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites, including both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. Against the Midianites, God commands Moses to kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known many by lying with him.”

Is our God a wrathful, vengeful, homicidal God? Or is our God a gracious, loving, compassionate and merciful God. Or... is it both? And we just don’t understand the complexities of God’s decisions and never will. And this is a truth we will always struggle with because it makes us so very uncomfortable.

These are difficult questions and topics we struggle with – and there are many more that I don't have time to talk about this morning. Every believer struggles grapples with these questions and must be prepared to give an answer to skeptical challenges. But even if doubt in these areas continue to exist for the believer, God's grace prevails. One pastor said, "The gospel doesn't depend on our 100 percent certainty, but on Jesus's 100 percent sufficiency"

It is God's uncomfortably persistent, sacrificial love – even while we were still sinners – that is our strong and secure foundation as we struggle with certainty. And it is to God's grace and that uncomfortable love that we now turn.