



Rev Chris Taylor - 3-10-19
Calling on the Name

This past week we heard bad news about both Luke Perry and Alex Trebek. Luke Perry, only 52, had a stroke and died way too young. He was the great heart-throb decades ago of "Beverly Hills 90120." Alex Trebek, on the other hand, was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. For the last 35 years he has served as the host of "Jeopardy." He is 78.

These are two people who have been making the journey with us – a part of our lives whether we were fans of their shows or not. Who doesn't know the host of "Jeopardy"? Who hasn't heard of Luke Perry or seen his picture on the cover of some supermarket tabloid at some point along the way?

The news about them reminds us how fragile life is, and how quickly everything can change. I love Trebek's response to the diagnosis. He moved towards what matter most in his life; towards his wife of 29 years. He said his one regret is that he didn't meet her sooner so that they could have had even more time together.

Where would your thoughts turn if you were told you had only months to live? The proximity of death can bring great clarity to our lives. It has a way of helping us see what really matters, and of stripping away the extraneous.

I've walked through the valley with a lot of people through the years. It has been one of the great privileges of my life. One thing I can tell you is that in thirty eight years of ministry I've never had someone tell me they wish they could have spent more time at work. I've heard lots of regrets, but I can't think of a single time when someone has told me they wished they could have made more money or lived in a bigger home. No, what they've talked about are the people they've hurt, or the times they've fallen short, or the people and special moments they are going to miss – a grandchild's wedding; a spouse who has always been by their side.

I think all of us can sense how differently we would look at life if we knew death was near. Here is the connecting point with our two texts this morning: when Scripture speaks of “being saved,” it is talking (at least in part) about seeing this life in a different way – a way not unlike how we would see it if death was close at hand. In a moment everything would change for us. We would realize how incredibly precious life is. Our values and priorities would change. We would see what brings life, what matters most in life, and what (perhaps surprisingly) actually isn’t all that important after all.

When Scripture speaks of being saved, that’s what it is getting at. Yes, through Jesus, we now have this promise of all eternity, and that does make a difference. But “being saved” isn’t just about eternity. It is also about experiencing the Kingdom-kind-of life here and now. It is about seeing life through a different lens, and beginning to experience it in the fullness of God’s intent.

Three times in our second lesson the apostle speaks of “being saved.” The first time is in the ninth verse; “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The last time is in the thirteenth verse, and is actually a quote from the prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In all three cases the word used is from the Greek “sode-zo”, a word that means to keep safe, to rescue from danger or destruction, or to make well.

In its way, it is what the psalmist is talking about in our first lesson – that refuge, that fortress, who will deliver us from the snare of the fowler and the deadly pestilence, who will ensure that no evil befalls us or scourge comes near our tent, who will command his angels to guard us and bear us up... this one who will be with us in trouble, who will rescue us and honor us and grant us long life and show us his salvation. The 91st Psalm is all about being saved.

Saved from what? Saved from that which threatens us, or undermines us; saved from anything that might rob this life of its richness and beauty; saved from using this one, precious gift of life on the inconsequential and insignificant; saved from a life without God.

In June 1994 Alvah Simon and his wife, Diana, set off in a 36-foot sailboat to explore the world just above the Arctic Circle. Four months later, he was trapped

alone on his boat, frozen in ice far from any human being with the long polar night now stretching out before him. For months he was trapped beneath drifting snow, enveloped by screaming blizzards, and struggling with crushing loneliness and his own private demons.

Why was he there? That's the remarkable thing: he didn't have to be. No one made him. In fact, he and his wife had been planning to finally settle down following a thirteen-year journey around the world. But in the end, he couldn't do it. He couldn't bear the thought of not pushing further. There was something in him that wouldn't let him rest; something he could never quite fill; an aching emptiness that kept pushing him further and further out towards the edge... a driving need not unlike that which pushes some people towards drugs or alcohol, others into countless hours at work; and still others into serial affairs.

We don't find the answer by focusing on the symptom: "Oh, if I just fix this then everything will be okay." That's the lie that our addictions would have us believe. No, we find the answer by addressing the emptiness underneath. We find it by turning towards that One who alone can fill the void – by turning towards this God by whom and for whom we were created.

Where have you been looking for refuge? In whom or what have you sought a sure foundation? There is only One who will not disappoint us; only One who can truly save us. Contrary to everything our instincts might tell us, it is not in putting ourselves first that we are going to find life at its best. No, it is in offering our lives to God, and making the choice to serve Him: that's when life at its fullest and most beautiful will finally begin to open up before us.