

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: Simon and Garfunkel
Sermon: Scarborough Fair

Isaiah 43:1-3

But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your stead.

Sermon:

I once told my wife before we were married that I'd climb the highest mountain for her, swim across the deepest ocean for her. Walk across the farthest desert for her. I was probably lying. At the very least, I was hoping to have to never prove such things. These are impossible things. Trust me, I did a lot of crazy things to win her love, but I didn't have to face lions, or go on a quest to prove anything - just had to dodge an angry exboyfriend of hers.

Our Simon and Garfunkel song today, Scarborough Fair, is a far much older song than what they recorded. It goes back centuries, to Old England. It's been written and rewritten and changed that who knows what the original really said. But the gist is the same. The lover calls out, I will love anyone who can do impossible things. I'll love you when you can make a shirt without seams, find an acre of land within the tide, harvest grain with a blade made of leather. If you can do the impossible, I will love you.

Some of us believe that in order for God to love us, we need to be perfect. We need to have impossible purity. Impossible thoughts. Impossible righteousness. If I can have impossible faith, God will then take notice, and love us. I'll get back to that later on.

At the change of seasons, we were going through some old clothes that we have in storage in our shed, and I came across some old pajamas that our boys used to wear, back when they were smaller than they are now. I am not an emotional man, but in looking at the patterns on their pj's, I was reminded of earlier days, of them running around in the living room as little toddlers. And I had a hard time parting with those clothes that we no longer needed and tears ran down my cheeks. As much as I would like all of them to be out of diapers, as much as I would like them to be done with car seats - there is a part of me that wants them to stay little forever and

keep our family just the way it is. Maybe some of you parents or grandparents feel that way sometimes - just to have a day to relive of days gone by. But the kids are getting older - and there is nothing I can do to stop it. I don't have that kind of power. There is a time for everything under the sun, there is a time to be born, a time to die. A time for nursery rhymes and a time for learner permits. Time moves on and I can't stop it. There are a lot of things that I cannot do. I can't successfully grow a garden. I can plant a garden, but by August, I have to mow it down and put it out of its misery because I can't get things to grow. I can't follow the lives of the Kardashians - for I know not what a Kardashian is, why they are important, and most of what they do I believe would tork me off. So I don't bother. I can't load a dishwasher. I try, but then my lovely wife comes right behind me and reconfigures it, suggesting I don't have the spacial intelligence to put things into a dishwasher. I can't run five miles anymore, let alone a marathon or stay up as late as I used to, I can't remember names. I can't seem to update my social media every month, let alone every day or hour. There are a lot of things I cannot do.

I remember when our kitty Zeke died several years ago. I say kitty. He was a 25 pound goofball. We found him behind the couch - kitty diabetes got 'em. And there is nothing I can do to fix this. A kiddo asked if we could get him medicine. Nope. Dead is dead. Can we take him to the doctor? Nope. Dead is dead. Can we change his batteries, plug him in, do something? Can we fluff him up, give him CPR, how can we fix this? We can't fix this. Dead is dead. And there was nothing I can do. You can't fix dead.

Several years ago, I performed a funeral service for a 25 year old who had committed suicide. And in the front row where the family sat there was a 4 year old kid, in a tux who throughout the whole service just dripping tears on his jacket, stared at the coffin, his favorite uncle - and there was nothing that I could do to help this kid. And I wanted to fix this. But I can't. I don't have that kind of power. All I could think was "your uncle made a horrible choice, and I can't explain it in such a way that it makes sense, because it doesn't. I'm so sorry." Dead is dead. You can't fix dead.

2000 years ago, Jesus was hanging on the cross, between two thieves, when he died. His body was so broken from the physical abuse he received during his arrest and trials that the crucifixion just finished the job. To make sure the guy was a goner they pierced his side with a spear. The guards took him down and they had no doubt that this Jesus of Natherath was dead. If there was any chance at all that he was still breathing, they wouldn't have taken him to a tomb. Several days later, Mary was on her way to the tomb, without a doubt, believing that Jesus was dead. And you can't fix dead. And we all have the reality of death sometime in our future. Ephesians puts it bluntly. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." Written by Paul to the church in Ephesus. "You are dead."

We are all dead men walking. Dead women walking. Life is a terminal disease. You can't beat it. We are lost. We are hopeless. We live by the flesh and die by the flesh. The first paragraph of the second chapter of Ephesians tells us that we are horrible people, children of wrath, and mankind is doomed. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. No matter what we do, no matter how we live, no matter how far medicine or technology take us, we can't escape our own demise. Even if we could, the earth will someday plunge into the sun, someday at the end of all time the galaxies will fizzle out, stars will no longer shine, and the universe will be no more. And there is nothing that we can do to stop it. Dead is dead. And we can't fix dead.

About four years ago, we had grandparents who brought one of their high school grandkids to church on Easter. He'd never been to church. Different kind of kid. Kid who wore all black, he had the black fingernails, black eyeliner. Gothic kind of kid. I really don't care how people dress - I really care about how people act and treat others, so I give everybody the benefit of the doubt. After the service, he caught me in the hallway and it looked like he had a question. He pulled me aside and asked, "So you're saying that Jesus was a Zombie." (Worried laughter). Jesus was a zombie. That's cute (sarcastically). Believe it or not, there is a part of me that treats liturgy with respect, a high church sense in me, if you will, that if I could have brought back stoning or flogging for such heresy and blasphemy, I would have right then and there. "Everybody back into the sanctuary, we're

going to burn the heretic.” “Jesus was a zombie. How dare you. I’ll show you zombie.” But as I talked to the kid, I came to realize that this was new territory for him. He didn’t know the Easter story, for that matter he didn’t know the Jesus story. So to him, this was how he honestly processed the information. He was asking a sincere question. He just didn’t have another name for it. And to someone who has never heard the story, zombie might be what comes to mind. You all know what a zombie is. They are out there in popular culture now than they ever have been. The living dead that walk around looking for something to eat. What do they eat? Brains. They eat brains. I have no idea why they are making a comeback now. We have zombie walks in Portland. People dress up like, zombies, and they walk around like, zombies. I don’t understand it.

And I couldn’t fault that kid who asked if Jesus was a zombie because it sounded like Jesus was a zombie, back from the grave - walking around. Maybe not eating brains, but still up and moving around anyway. I shared with the kid that no, Jesus was not a zombie, and I brushed it off as a silly question. But I’ve had 4 years to think about this, like I said, I’m not that bright, it takes me awhile. And if I could rewind 4 years and have that conversation with that kid again, this is what I would say, and this is what I want to say to you this morning. Remember this: Zombies, (as if they were real) are the walking dead looking for life. Zombies are the walking dead looking for life. Tell that to your neighbor. **But know this: Jesus is life looking for the walking dead.** Jesus is life looking for the walking dead. Tell that to your neighbor! He said it in John, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” The giver of all good things. The alpha and omega. The beginning and the end. You can’t kill the giver of life. He is life. Love the opening words to the 43rd Chapter of Isaiah: But now, this is what the Lord says: He who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. God doesn’t require perfection from us in order to win his love. God doesn’t require impossible tasks for us to be with him. We can’t get to heaven on our own merit. God doesn’t owe us anything. Dead is dead, but He can fix that. There are a lot of things I cannot do, but God can do all things. He even says, if I try to pass through the waters, he is with me. If I try to swim across the deepest depths, he is with me. If I walk through the fires of life, I do not go alone.

Whatever fear or despair I might carry, whatever griefs or burdens I carry, whatever pain or guilt I carry, I carry that in vain, for if death cannot keep God’s mercies and grace from me, then there is nothing I can’t face. We believe that the saints keep singing on the other side, and that we will someday join them. We believe that even though we are the walking dead, we are made alive through Christ! Dead is dead. You can’t fix dead. I can’t fix dead. But God! God can fix dead. And by the grace of God, who redeems us all, we are alive forevermore. And the people of God said, “Amen!”