

## **AUGUST 17, 2019 SUMMARY SERMON - JOHN TSCHUDY**

### **SCRIPTURE LESSON 5:1-7, HEBREWS 11:29-12:2, LUKE 12:49-56**

Isaiah the prophet of God is reminding the people of Judah and Jerusalem that they owe everything they have to God and the covenant God established with their ancestors that if they were obedient and faithful to God, God would bless them with many great riches. The prophet uses the images of a beautiful vineyard to describe what the people of Israel were supposed to be. But instead of following God's way the people worshipped other Gods, the rich did not care for those in need and injustice ruled the land. Thus God has no choice but to destroy the beautiful vineyard that was Judah because it failed to produce the crops it was supposed to produce to make the world a better place to live. If we as the church or this country claim to be the new people of God or an example of how God's people are to live in this world then we must hear the warning of Isaiah and heed it and make the changes in how we relate to others and how we live in this world.

According to the author of Hebrews much of the Old Testament is written to convey to us the stories of faithfulness of many of the heroes of the Old Testament. But also how often things that seemed impossible happened. Such as how were the people of Israel able to cross the Red Sea, while the army of Egypt drowned. Why is it so many people were willing to take on difficult tasks and do remarkable things at great risk to themselves, because they believed in what God was calling them to do? How come people are willing to accept these difficult challenges God has called them to do? It is because they have faith in God and what God is trying to do in the world, even if it seems impossible according to the world's standards. It is by faith in God that they are willing to obey God's call on their life.

The author goes on to call us to put our trust and faith in God because we are surrounded by what he calls, "A Great Cloud of Witnesses", because we have these stories of faithful service from so many people that we are called to respond to God with devotion to God's way. But the cloud of witnesses that surrounds is not just biblical figures from thousands of years ago. Here in this area are stories of faithfulness that defies human logic according to today's worldly standards. The very fact that these three churches exist is an example of faithful service to God against the common wisdom of the world at the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century. A part of all three of our churches began because of the devotion of one man requesting to come to the Rainy River Country with his family to proclaim the message of God and start churches to provide Christian Education should be a lesson to all of us of what the author of Hebrews is talking about.

The Rev. T.W. Howard and his wife Susan Collier, who interestingly kept her own name, even back then, traveled from their base in Birchdale to International Falls and west to Warroad to start congregations is amazing. Traveling by rail, the river and trails they worked to do God's work. They and the people they worked with, some of them ancestors of some of you built churches where the word of God was taught and proclaimed. They are part of the "Cloud of Witnesses" we are called to be a part of as we strive to continue their work in this area and try to figure out the best way to do that. Many of the churches they started have closed and many no longer exist even as buildings but their ministries go on, through our congregations.

Jesus tells us he came to proclaim a message that went against the logic of the world that would divide people and cause conflict and indeed the Gospel message has done that throughout history and still does today. This happens because it defies the message of the world and the so called "wisdom of people." Very often we are choosing the easier way of going along with the wisdom of the world, as the church, rather than bearing the fruit that God and Rev. Howard and Susan worked to plant here. Let us accept the challenge to join the cloud of witnesses to God's way, in Jesus' Name.