

Message Series on the Old Testament, The Bible Jesus Read:

A Faith with

Chutzpah!

by the Rev. Scott Young

St. John's Bowmanville

8 and 10 am Sun Feb.

2, 2014

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

First off, I want to

thank Christopher for

his invitation to help with the service this morning. It is a very real privilege to be

with you this morning. As you no doubt know, Christopher is leading the youth

retreat that is underway this weekend inspiring the youth of both St. John's and

the Halliburton in their religious and faith journeys. We all will include

Christopher and the youth in our prayers, praying both for their safety in the car

trips up to Halliburton and the success of the retreat itself.

I also want to add a few liner notes for my sermon this morning. I have entitled the sermon, a Faith with Chutzpah. The Yiddish word chutzpah has a number of meanings in current parlance. In some contexts, the word has a quality of audacity, with a sense of insolence. The Yiddish word comes from the Hebrew word hutspa which meaning of insolence. In modern English it has taken on a wider context. Popularized through the vernacular in film literature and television it has taken on a meaning of courage, mettle or ardour. It is in this sense that I mean to use the word today. Hence I am suggesting a faith with real courage, with mettle and ardour.

Let's also take a moment to rehearse the track line for this morning's sermon.

First off I want to appreciate the meaning and insights of the two scripture passages from the lectionary this morning. With that under our belts, I want to move to consider further the message that the Hebrew bible had for Jesus and his family as he prepared for his ministry and the value of the book for us today. In fact the power of the Old Testament is the sermon series that Christopher had introduced as we returned from our Christmas Holidays at the first of January.

2/

We are reading then, about the intriguing story and old Simeon and Annas in the temple on the day when Jesus was formally dedicated to God according to the custom of the Law. It would be much like we were celebrating the sacrament of baptism for an infant from the congregation and then the whole ceremony got unceremoniously interrupted by a couple of senior citizens who tottered up the font, grabbed the baby and started make predictions of who this child would grow up to be. Mary and Joseph were in the Temple to fulfill a religious ritual every bit as familiar to them and the others in the Temple that day as an infant baptism is to many Christians today.

A magnificent Messianic spectacle it was not . But there is something about this scene's humble trapping, something about the picture of these ancient-looking people bearing witness to something no one else could see, something about the fact that it was precisely two little old people like this whom the Holy Spirit would

raise up to bear that witness and not someone from the Temple elite or the Roman leadership. There is just something about all this that speaks volumes about the ways of God and fundamentally surprising nature of the one true gospel.

And as we turn to Isaiah, we see that this text is part of our continuing exploration of the impact of the appearance of Christ child on the world . We have found in the past, the absurd attempts to assuage the anger of God through offers of unnecessary sacrifices from oil to rams to first – born children. All of these were judged completely inadequate, since God has no interest in such physical sacrifices. what God wanted instead was justice among the people, a justice that flowed freely an unbreakable and steadfast love, the sort of love that God models with the people.

Turning to the Old Testament as the book that Jesus read I want to share with you some textures of the Old Testament that might breathe new life into the pages of

the book. Certainly all of us need an inspiration to deal with the knocks of every day life, and the Old Testament has the Chutzpah to do it.

When I was at the recent Mesopotamia exhibit I was amazed to read that original footings of the tower of Babel remain to this day. The narrative of the city of Babel is recorded in Genesis 11. As you recall, the people sought to make bricks and build a city and a tower with its top in the sky and make a name for them. God went down and confounded their speech so that they stopped building the city and the tower.

It is one thing to read about Babel but to run your hands across the sand in the same sand that Genesis recalls in ancient Mesopotamia is inspiring. Having worked in social work with Veterans all these many years I know how lives can become difficult, and I sense it is the same for all of us.

Whether the problems we face are of a spiritual sort, or financial, or family, we all face them. The point is that we need our faith, an inner strength to cope with whatever issues the future holds for us. Within the verses of the Old Testament contains a body of spiritual antibodies we can rely upon to cope with whatever tomorrow brings for us. We have, then, a new courage, a new strength, a faith Chutzpah, so we can deal with whatever hassle next week brings for us.

Some of us may be familiar with the TVO Ontario TV series called Time Team.

This is a show exploring the British Archaeology team who go all over Great

Britain digging up this community or that exploring mysteries of the past in

England. Sometimes archaeologists are excited about the artifacts they have

found but they don't know who is speaking to them from the past. Archaeologists

working in the Middle East have found in the Old Testament a secret weapon

against this problem. They know that they can refer to the Old Testament

For example, the historicity of the Assyrian king Sargon (record in Isaiah 20.1 has

also been confirmed in spite of the fact his name was not seen in any non-biblical

record. Archaeology proved the Biblical account to be true when Sargon's

palace was discovered in Khorsabad Iraq. More importantly, the event

mentioned in Isaiah 20 Sargon's capture of Ashdod, was recorded on the palace

walls, confirming the history recorded in Old Testament scripture. Fragments of a

stela, (an incised stone pillar) were also found at Ashdod. Remembering that

Sargon was a Mesopotamian King that lived over 4000 years ago, I think that the

Old Testament legacy should also be sufficient for our needs dealing with the

Monday morning commute hassles.

If I may, it seems to me that often we may become discouraged reading the Old Testament story when we become mired down negotiating a record that is foreign to us. When we read about this one begetting that one who in turn begets the other one we may wonder what application this narrative has to us. The fact of the matter is that the Old Testament is a fabric laced with thematic threads running from beginning to end. Let's explore some of them.

One of the strongest themes is that of Staying on Course. Frequently the Israel was to travel to find the proper route. Throughout the Old Testament, God is providing different kinds of landmarks in the wilderness, mountains, rock outcroppings, rivers, and marks to guide Israel on their journey. In the same sense, in Isaiah 13.10,

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will light.

The way of the lord is simple, you are either walking the Way of the Lord, or not. and in a modern world marked with difficulty, pain and confusion we really do need a spiritual GPS guider to help us find our way. Remember it is easy,

it is simple. You are either walking the way of the Lord, or you are not. You are either walking the way of the Lord, going that a way, or you are not.

It is important to know too, that this is not the only, Spiritual thread running its course through the Old Testament. The road map of the Old Testament is cluttered with many motifs including the Possibility of redemption, The Covenant of the Promised Land, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Fertility of the Land. But relax, we can't cover them all this morning. Suffice it to say that these threads of spirituality are there binding the Old Testament there with lots of spiritual strength to bind us together when the going gets tough.

You will remember that Christopher warned you when he began his Old Testament series that some of the Old Testament narrative was basic, bold and somewhat brutal. And while the Old Testament does not have the delicate wording of the Pauline verses of the New Testament perhaps this provides us with the inner strength to deal with homelessness, PTSD, and discord.

One of my Old Testament heroes is Hosea. Hosea was directed by God to marry Gomer, a promiscuous woman of ill-repute. God instructs Hosea to go out into the community and pay whatever funds needed to gain her release from slavery,

returning her to their home and her status as his wife. God tells Hosea to act with courage, to act with Chutzpah, to make Gomer his wife .

This is not a 12 Step model of reconciliation, God tells Hosea to go out in the sordid world Gomer has moved to, pay her bills, reconcile with her and bring her home.

Trust me the Hebrew narrative is stark and direct. I am giving an overview to not purposefully offend. Read it for yourself. There is not need for a Margaret Atwood like imagination needed here to understand what is going on.

Sometimes, I feel that our relationship with the Old Testament is fractured because it seems that the text is so old and distant it is hard to establish a spiritual relationship with the text. To make our relationship with the OT cannon, perhaps it would be good for us to visit the Dead Sea scrolls. These are scrolls of the Old Testament that were found in caves on the West Bank of Palestine in 1947. They were made available to Ontarians at the Royal Ontario Museum a few years ago. These scrolls were written both in Hebrew and Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke. With these discoveries biblical scholars have been able to study the writings of Isaiah using the same translation that Jesus held in his hands. With

this discovery, we can dispense with the musty mould of the antiquities and embrace the same scrolls that Jesus used.

For computer geeks, I would also like to reference an interesting article recently in the Guardian newspaper. This writer called us all to note that twenty year old scholarly journals and research papers were being lost for ever simply because they were being stored in computer filing systems that were no longer current and technologically valid. Since the computer storage software was no longer in use, the data contained in the software was no longer accessible. The author concluded noting that the 3000 year old Assyrian tablets of Mesopotamia were still readable. Good to know that no matter where we store our computer data of today and no matter what version of Microsoft word we use, we can still access Isaiah.

On this groundhog day 2014, it seems to make sense to go to ground, to get back to basics, to learn whatever we can wherever we can to figure out how to survive facing issues that are hard for us. Finding mentors at times like this is always, I think, a good way of arming our ventures forth.

I believe we have lost a true mentor in down to earth politics in the loss of Pete Seeger. Mr. Seeger died January 27, 2014. He was an American folk singer, with memorable folk songs like Where have all the flowers gone, If I had a Hammer, Turn, Turn Turn with lyrics adopted from Ecclesiastes. Black listed in the McCarthy era and banned from network TV and radio, a World War Two Veteran, he supported his family playing endless strings of gigs at union halls, legion branches and church basements. He was a prominent singer of protest music in support of international disarmament, civil rights, counterculture and environmental causes.

Not a man who let old age stop his protest activities, at 93, he performed in 2013 at a Farm Aid rally. Ten days before he died at 94, he was chopping wood at his upstate New York cabin. Certainly a man imbedded with Faith and Chutzpah.

Hopefully, I have ignited a fire in your souls to find the thread of faith in the Old Testament that will carry your soul through the rapids of the upcoming week.

And despite whatever the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that we meet in the week to come, let the faith of Chutzpah follow us.

