

RADICAL TRUST: THE GOD OF THE EXIT SIGN  
West Valley Presbyterian Church  
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Sometimes we all need a little bit of encouragement the African American preacher I used to go and listen to as a child used to say.

I got to hear great preaching in that little white clapboard church in Princeton NJ where I grew up – great preaching in that little church located in the less than desirable section of town

Where there were no mansions with elevators in them, like there were on the other side of town

There were no manicured lawns or long driveways in that neighborhood; just simple houses, apartments and...

this little white clapboard church...small and plain on a corner on Witherspoon Street. But in that little building you had a richness that could be found nowhere else in Princeton...inside were people who knew Jesus, and who had relied on him to get them through the tough times...educated, uneducated, mostly black, some white, Indian, Asian

It was a place where faith was real because it had been honed by lives struggled...

Every Sunday they would sing these words from the song There is A Balm in Gilead..."**Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my works are in vain, BUT THEN HOLY SPIRIT revives my soul again...**"

And our preacher would get up and kind of lean over the pulpit, look down at us over his glasses, shake his head, and say it again, "sometimes," he'd say, "we all need a little encouragement, cause life can get you down. That's the way life is....he'd say. That's just how it is.

Things don't always work out the way you want.  
Life happens, and you wish it hadn't happened the way its happened.  
Sometimes life gets to be a burden, and we get weighed down by cares and concerns that are too heavy for us to manage.  
And then we start to fear the future, and there's nothing worse than fearing what's coming when your already burdened down by what has been.

That's why sometimes in this life we all need a little encouragement.  
Jesus knew that. ...that's why he said...  
, "In this world you will have tribulation but..."  
Choose the option that finishes his words

- A. **Be a worry wart because that will definitely change your circumstances**
- B. **Stress out and be a jerk to everyone around you**
- C. **Be of good cheer**

If you answered C you are correct! Why? Because Jesus says that he has overcome the world.

What does that mean? He asked us all. And then he said...

It means that when you are discouraged and when circumstances seem to be closing in, when what you had hoped for is not happening, or there seem to be barriers in your way...

**TRUST IN GOD. DO NOT FEAR. TRUST IN GOD. HE WILL BE FAITHFUL TO BRING YOU OUT.**

I remembered his words this week, because I was feeling discouraged  
I was thinking about our denominational concerns, anticipating the town meeting today, and wishing that things were different  
Wishing that we could spend our energies and resources on things that were helping people, not dividing people  
And yet here we are, and it is a necessary process that we go through this, but it is not always a pleasant one

And then the Holy Spirit came...and revived my soul in its discouragement and the Holy Spirit reminded of a great theologian...the late Dr. Sues who's birthday was this month, by the way

He's got a book called, **Oh The Places You'll Go.**

And it felt to me as if this were a promise for West Valley Presbyterian Church that we needed to hear, right now, in this place today...

I want to read part of it to you now and I've added a little addendum...

**(Images from book if possible)**

***Congratulations! Today is your day***

***You're off to Great Places!***

***You're off and away!***

***You have brains in your head***

***You have feet in your shoes***

***You can steer yourself the direction you choose***

***You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care***

***About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there"***

***With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet***

***You're too smart to go down any not-so- good street...***

***You'll get mixed up of course, as you already know***

***You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go***

***So be sure when you step, step with care and great tact***

***And remember that Life is a Great Balancing Act  
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft  
And never mix up your right foot with your left  
And will you succeed?  
Yes! You will indeed  
98 and ¾ percent guaranteed  
KID You'll Move Mountains***

***So...be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray  
Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea  
You're off to Great Places!  
Today is your day  
Your mountain is waiting  
So...get on your way***

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***West Valley Church  
Its up to you too  
To conquer this mountain  
God will see you through  
There is a bright future with lots of good stuff  
After this mountain, and if that's not enough  
You have brains in your head  
And Feet in your shoes  
And the Holy Spirit to guide you with all of his clues  
You've got prayer, and great people,  
You've got scripture, and song  
You've got older wise mentors to help you along  
You're a radical, risk taking, generous bunch  
And God is right with you - its more than a hunch  
And you will succeed...yes you will succeed  
150% percent guaranteed  
God has guided his people  
up to this day  
And God has no thought  
about going away***

Today I am not talking just about town meetings and perspectives on issues. I am talking about all of the mountains we face...all of the tribulations that come our way...all of those things that make life hard to bear sometimes.

Those tribulations, those concerns, those trials that make the pastor of my childhood lean over that pulpit and say "Sometimes we need a little encouragement"

There are two phrases that God says more frequently in scripture than any other. The first we talked about at the womens retreat ...it is the phrase

## **I AM WITH YOU**

God says that over and over again because sometimes it seems like we are all alone.  
The enemy would like us to think that.  
It's such a lie friends..We are never alone.  
God is holding you right now.  
God is breathing his breath of life in you right now.  
God is aware of the hairs on your head right now.  
The enemy would love for us to believe that this isn't so... fear is his tactic  
When we think we're alone, when we begin to think its all up to us... then THAT'S  
WHEN we begin to panic and get afraid.

Which brings me to the next thing that God says to his people over and over, down through the centuries – more than any other three words in scripture he says these three little words

## **DO NOT FEAR**

It seems like the human race is prone to fear. Fear of the future, fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of what is known, fear of death, fear of life...fear...fear...fear

It always puzzled me why we call the buzzer on our clock or cell phone...or the melody that wakes us up in the morning an ALARM. Ever think about that? We jump out of bed and start the day with an **ALARM**. Yikes! I better get going or else...

Kind of sets the tone for the day. Many of us live in a general state of ALARM.

And yet Jesus says...be of good cheer. If I am afraid, or in a state of alarm...how can I be of good cheer? How can I have joy? How can I laugh easily and well? How can I take on a challenge or take risk for God if I am already afraid?

At times when we are afraid its important to remember.  
To remember what God has done in the past. To remember his faithfulness in the past...what we have experienced of Gods leading...and apply it for the future...the part that we still have to go that we haven't experienced yet.

Let me ask you something. Has God ever led his people before today? Has God ever found a way for you out of a situation that seemed to have NO EXIT?

There's a book in the Bible. It's the second book of the Bible. Its called **EXODUS**. I love the fact that it is called EXODUS. Its like a big EXIT SIGN...right at the beginning of the BIBLE. As if God is saying right at the start...**I am the God of the EXIT SIGN. (IMAGE)**

I am a God who leads, and guides and finds a way out ....for you

You see, once upon a time there was a people, called the Hebrews who were worn down and discouraged by their manual labor.

Being slaves to the Egyptians was burdensome and taxing.

God heard the groaning of these people and led them out...using Moses as his leader. Moses led them out, but then Pharaoh changed his mind and came after them.

The people saw Pharaoh coming after them with his armies and horses and they were afraid.

They were pinned against the sea with nowhere to go. They thought God had abandoned them.

That they were alone, as we often feel today, pinned against a sea of unknown threats and nowhere to go.

But God was with his people then, just like he's with you right now. He opened the Red Sea...and they escaped on foot walking on dry land...

### **PUT IN Exodus 14:21-22**

God made a way– by opening the sea – making a way where there was no way before...

And for awhile they were of good cheer. They danced and celebrated. But then they started to look around at the desert that surrounded them and they forgot about how God had led them to this point.

They forgot very quickly about God's faithfulness

Because the wilderness was scary and they feared that they would have nothing to eat, as we often fear in the wilderness of our own lives when the enemy whispers in our ear...**you are alone...there is no hope, and no way out of this one. God has abandoned you**

**Abandoned you because of poor choices you've made**

**Abandoned you because you don't measure up to his standards**

**Abandoned you because he doesn't care...You are on your own**

There could be nothing more untrue than this, but it's where the people were that day

Where is God? The people cried out.

We are alone and we are going to die out here.

We are afraid. We should go back to Egypt – go back into bondage – because then at least we'd have something to eat

We'd rather be slaves than starve!

But the God of the Exit sign said no way. You will not die. You are not alone. Fear not!

I will provide. And he found them water, and sent them bread called manna and quail. That's the story of the book of Exodus.

**All through the Old Testament the God of the Exit Sign kept finding a way out for his people** – moving mountains for them, giving them safety and a home; helping them healing them, rescuing them.

All through the Old Testament the people continued to forget about him; but God never forgot about them...

And because he never forgot about them one day, to help them understand about his faithfulness God sent Jesus who was his EXIT sign in flesh and blood.

And Jesus taught his people all about his deliverance...his way out

And he taught them and told them

**I provide a way out for you from the bondage of sin – I forgive you**

**I provide a way out for you from the bondage of loneliness – I befriend you**

**I provide a way out for you from purposelessness – I promise you a future and a hope**

**I provide a way out for you from death – I give heaven to all who put their trust in me**

**I am the God of the EXIT sign. Trust me I am faithful to lead you out of whatever situation you find yourself in, and move your mountains. I AM WITH YOU. DO NOT FEAR.**

Jesus told the people if you trust me, I will deliver you. I will be found faithful.

*Oh the places you'll go if you put your trust in me...he told them over and over again*

In so many ways

And they believed him for a while

But then came the darkest day in the history of the human race when Jesus himself was put to death.

And when they placed his cold body in a cold tomb that afternoon and sealed it up there might as well have been a sign on that tomb that said NO EXIT

Because no one reverses death – that's a mountain no one can move

So fear set in.

The disciples lock themselves away in a room afraid that God has abandoned them

Afraid for their lives, their future, their survival

Its scary to feel alone. Its scary to believe that God is dead in your life.

That now its all up to us

How much we need him!

*If God is dead writes Paul to the churches, then you and I...we are people most to be pitied.*

Because left up to us...there is no EXIT sign.

There is no way through the wilderness.

There is no oasis, there is no manna, there is no promised land.

There is no place that we can go.

We are pinned against the sea of our own demise - a short span on this earth ...and then that's it. Death is the perfect statistic. One for one, every time.

Can you sense the disciples despair, locked in that upper room, fearing for their lives? Thinking that following Jesus had been a dead end?

**And then on the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors are locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them...**

**"Peace be with you!"**

That greeting became the greeting of the early church.

They were overjoyed...one place in scripture says they disbelieved for joy.

You mean you were faithful again God? Yet again?

You mean that you turned the tables for your people... even on death?

You mean that you God are still the God of the EXIT SIGN even in the face of the crucifixion? Are you really bigger and stronger than anything that evil can do to us?

Will you really lead us through to a better place?

Will you get us through the wilderness? Can we hope in you God to make a way for us when it seems that we're at a dead end?

When our back is against the wall and that NO EXIT looms large and neon in the dark night of our soul

And the enemy breathes in our ear...*theres no way out...its over*

Are you able to move *those mountains* God? Are you able?

The answer from the hosts of heaven and all the cloud of witnesses of the saints who have gone before, and the testimony of the prophets and apostles is a resounding **YES!**

Learn this they cry out to us today... **God is faithful...**

Learn this they shout to us from the pages of scripture....**God is utterly and completely trustworthy...do not fear**

What mountains do you need moved in your life today?

What wilderness do you find yourself in?

What is causing you to fear?

(STORY)

The God of the EXIT sign stands by holding out his hand to you – its still a wounded hand because his suffering for you made a way, where before there wasn't a way – and he wants you to remember that he will go to any lengths to rescue you – to bring you out

He suffered so you'd trust him...

Take hold of that hand that gave all for you, and ask him to guide you

Peace be with you...he tells you...don't be afraid...***I've got this***

***Trust me. I am with you.***

West Valley Presbyterian Church  
Put your trust in the Lord, and don't be afraid  
In this wilderness time, God will make a way

I have shown myself faithful in the past, God tells us  
And I never change  
I am the God of the EXIT sign  
Put your trust in me, and be of good cheer  
And when you do that, West Valley Presbyterian Church,  
*Oh the places you'll go....*

I'll tell you this too. I told those leaders, "Imagine a movement where denominational meetings never waste anybody's time. Imagine a movement that says, 'When leaders gather, when volunteers' hours are misspent in black holes of bureaucracy, it is not excusable organizational behavior. It demotivates volunteers. It chokes life and energy out of mission. It repels leaders who want to have impact. It is not God's will for the church, and it's not okay.' Imagine a movement where when leaders gather it is to learn, to receive vision, to mentor, to get equipped, to be accountable to one another, to encourage one another; that when leaders gather, what they spend their time doing is talking about how to reach lost people for Jesus, how to worship more deeply, how to help folks who are under-resourced, how to make disciples, how to do compassion and justice in the world, so that young leaders, when they look at that, say, 'I have to be a part of that. I'll sacrifice anything to be a part of that.'" Well, that's what we're thinking, praying, discussing these days. What I love most about this church is it is a Jesus church, and he aches to make happen again what happened in Acts 2. I'll just say this personally. If



you're here visiting, if you're in spiritual seeker mode, that's great. I'm so glad. If we can help you with that, we would love to. Nothing is more thrilling for us than that. If this is your church home and you're a follower of Jesus, then we're all being asked to make a commitment, to put a stake in the ground around UP, IN, and OUT.

In the UP dimension: "I will make following Jesus in the moment-by-moment living of my everyday life my number one priority." Just the power of the amen. "When we all gather for worship, I won't be casual about that commitment; I'll be here. I will invite seeking friends to be a part of this as well. I will tell them about my faith and try to be used by God to help them." If you're not a member of this church, you'll say, "Okay, I'm going to actually make a commitment to the body."

Then around IN: "I'm not just going to look at the back of somebody's head every week. I'm actually going to get into a little community. I'm going to know and be known. I'll be part of a team and serve the body."

Then around OUT: "I'm going to go and bless." Then, if you're a member, as we look over our denominational future, we're asking, "Would you be willing to make this part of your own spiritual journey?"

Our own elders have been doing this. They've prayed, discerned, discussed as best they could. The denominational issue is not an easy or simple question. I have really struggled over it. I really have. Our elders have as well. They've prayed as best they can. Now it goes before our whole body, before all of our members. Part of the legacy of the church that we love... Part of being Presbyterian means it's not a oneman show or a one-woman show. We believe God guides us in community. We love that about our heritage and our beliefs. And God will do that.

People ask me sometimes if I am nervous about the outcome or this process, and I have to tell you the truth. I have not lost one second of sleep over this. Our task is to be a community led by God. Has God ever led his people before? God led his people through the wilderness. God led people out of Egypt. God led his people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God led his people through the prophets. God led his people when they were in exile. God led his people at Pentecost through an

outpouring of his Holy Spirit that burned the church and changed the world.

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I really don't think God is sitting up in heaven right now, biting his nails, asking, "What am I going to do this time?" If we walk as humble, civil, loving, surrendered followers of Jesus, then our future is as bright as all heaven. Of course, if we don't do that, no human vote one way or another is going to matter, can replace what only God can bring. What matters is following Jesus. Next week, the whole message is going to be devoted to this book, Zealot. I don't know how many of you have read it. It has been #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list. It's about Jesus, and it's raising big questions about his identity and whether we can trust the New Testament about him. I love about our church that we'll tackle questions like that. So I hope you'll be here and invite friends, because this is stirring up a lot of conversation. After that, we're going to launch a series called Defining Moments, because for all of us as individuals and for us as a church, there are a lot of defining moments these days. Once there was a day when the Holy Spirit fell upon a group of people, ordinary people, people like you and me, with such power that old divisions melted away and people devoted themselves to God and to each other. Their masks came off, and they got real with each other. The rich gave to the poor, and everybody served, and they changed the world. Can God not do it again? Has the Holy Spirit lost his power? Will you give your life to go from here to there? Let's pray together. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, thank you for this amazing, remarkable gift called the church. Thank you for what happened that's recorded there in Acts 2. God, thank you for this church right here, for this group of people. God, would your Holy Spirit fall on each one of us, even this day, even this week? We ask and pray in Jesus' name, amen.