

#50 15-16

Psalm 65

Joel 2:23-32

Luke 18:9-14

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

We Are All Trying to Survive

Friday night, I was driving back from taking the Youth home from ICMYG, and I must say, Friday evenings have become some of my most sacred moments. Let me set the stage for you a little. I pick up the kids and it is still light out, and we talk in the car about what has happened in the past week, and check up on each other on our way to the church.

Then we get here and those from the car unite with those who are already here, and they just love on each other. They hug, they squeal, they talk, they share music, they catch up as a whole. They get drinks and snacks and we sit around a table and talk about some topic. Then slowly but surely, people disperse into their own sup groups and just be. Some talking, some playing instruments . . . some doing both. Then, when 9 PM rolls around, I load up those returning o Frederick and I drive them home. In the dark. And Dereck connects his music which he has downloaded into his phone into my car's system and he plays the DJ, and the music is unbelievably diverse - from Sinatra to the most recent rap. He keeps me informed about music, for that I am forever grateful. And I drive extra slowly on the way back, in order to make the most of this precious time.

I drop each off, and everyone gets out of the car to give hugs, and then gets back into the car until all have arrived safely home. And I drive home in the dark, feeling so blessed. And usually "The Moth" radio show is on NPR and I listen to some amazing stories as I drive in the far right lane on 270 exactly the speed limit, not over mile over or maybe a little under. For those who don't know, "The Moth Radio Hour" show is a collection of people telling stories from their personal life.

This past Friday I turned on in time to hear the middle of the talk by Frederick Hauck, called, *Reflections From Space*. From the website about him: "Captain Frederick Hauck spent 29 years in the US Navy as a combat pilot, test pilot, and NASA Astronaut. His awards include two Department of Defense Distinguished Service Medals, the NASA Distinguished Service Medal, and the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was inducted into the Astronaut Hall of Fame in 2001."

His talk was about a trip he took into space on the shuttle - the first trip after the Challenger explosion and the loss of his friends and colleagues. Now, the view of the earth from the space shuttle is not like the pictures we know from taken on the moon, it is "only" about 200 mile away from the earth. And he tells of a poignant moment when he was up in the shuttle, looking at the earth.

"We were on the dark side of the earth, and I saw the river Nile at night . . . and off in the distance the deserts . . . in the Arabian Peninsula, every so often you'd see a pinprick of light - and I figured that that was campfires of Bedouins - people who are out there trying to survive - and I thought, were all trying to survive, they in the desert, us in space, all of us here on earth. And had that thought that it doesn't matter your ethnicity, your color, your religion, it doesn't matter if you are in a position ... where you need to depend upon someone else to survive you will figure out a way to help each other. So that was as close to being religious as I've gotten, I think.

So, here I am driving in my car, in the dark, looking at the lights of the other cars around me, listening to the story from this amazing man, and it seems so true. It seems to me that that is the one unifying, profound truth - we are all trying to survive.

Each of us, and everyone we meet, is dealing with life as best as they can, considering all they have inherited genetically, culturally, socially . . . everyone - trying to survive. Some people have less material challenges to survival - but then they too have to struggle with their emotions, their loves, their dislikes, the people around them - and there is a degree of surviving in that as well. Survival isn't just a matter of having food and shelter and fresh water . . . there is health and love and pain and being witnesses to injustice - survival is spiritual as much as anything.

We can all live, even with very limited resources. But sometimes survival is more than living - it is being. Being fully who we are and who we know God is calling us to become! Knowing that we are just little dots on this planet but we are all connected in ways we are aware of, and way we have no way to know - but we are.

This reminded me of another Moth story I heard from an astronaut ~ Michael Massimino, a veteran of two NASA space flights. He told the story of trying to repair the Hubble Space telescope and how he *almost* failed the mission and broke it. He spoke of his fear while out there, and his enormous loneliness. But a solution was found, there was help and it got fixed. And he returned to Earth:

A few days later, we get back. Our families come to meet us at the airfield. And I'm driving home to my house with my wife, my kids in the backseat. And she starts telling me about what she was going through that Sunday that I was spacewalking, and how she could tell, listening, watching the NASA television channel, how sad I was. That she detected a sadness in my voice that she had never heard from me before, and it worried her.

I wish I would've known that when I was up there, 'cause this loneliness that I felt – really, Carol was thinking about me the whole time. And we turned the corner to come down our block, and I could see my neighbors were outside. They had decorated my house, and there were American flags everywhere. And my neighbor across the street was holding a pepperoni pizza and a six-pack of beer, two things that unfortunately we still cannot get in space.

And I got out of the car, and they were all hugging me. I was still in my blue flight suit, and they were saying how happy they were to have me back and how great everything turned out. I realized my friends, man, they were thinking about me the whole time. They were with me too.

The next day we had our return ceremony; we made speeches. The engineers who had worked all these years with us, our trainers, the people that worked in the control center, they started telling me how they were running around like crazy while I was up there in my little nightmare, all alone. How they got the solution from the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, and how the team that was working on that Sunday figured out what to do, and they checked it out, and they radioed it up to us.

I realized that at the time when I felt so lonely, when I felt detached from everyone else – literally, like I was away from the planet – that really I never was alone, that my family and my friends and the people I worked with, the people that I loved and the people that cared about me, they were with me every step of the way.

This is all what our faith is all about - remembering that we are never truly alone, even when we feel like it. We are all lights on this planet, connected in ways we may never fully comprehend - and our human task is to try to discover how we are connected to each other. Which means we have to listen and care and break down all the barriers between each other. This is what is so miraculous about our faith - because it tells us that nothing can separate us from God - not even death - that we are connected to each other and when we care for each other, we care caring for Christ, and when we care for Christ, we are responding to God's mystical influence in our lives. Proving that creator and creations are called to be one and live in peace. We are all just trying to survive, and we are all called to help each other to survive.

In closing, I am going to read the Epistle lesson for today from 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 because it actually was what inspired my thinking today. The tale of a man who really struggled to survive and be true to his faith - his sense of being exhausted in the efforts and the advantages of his efforts in Christ's name:

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.