

## ***Recollected: "Dead Mice"***

Friends! Let's begin with prayer this morning!

### ***Prayer:***

### ***Preface:***

Well, friends.

We're moving forward with a series based on Paul's statement in Philippians 3, in which he says, "It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you."

And, most simply, we'll be taking another look at some of my favorite messages that I've preached in the past, those that I think might be most useful to position us for faithful reflection and action. I'm revisiting them, fixing what was wonky and wrong, editing a bit, you know, and what we'll have is what we'll have.

### ***Sharing:***

This morning, I'm going to share a story about something that happened to me, oh, a decade ago. Well: It didn't happen to me. It happened slowly over the winter of 2010. And I'm sharing it for a couple of reasons.

First of all, I think it's a helpful connecting point to the

passages that were read to us, which are basic calls to persevere in our faith. To endure in our faith-keeping.

### ***Making Faith Sense:***

And secondly, I want to model one example of what some authors of have called “making faith sense.”

We are always trying to make sense of what happens to us in the world. But we don't always try to make sense of life with our main reference point being Christ. In our making sense of life we need to make sure that our points of reference are *Christian* things: our spiritual formation, what the Bible has to say about the things happening to or around us. When we reflect on our lives and their stuff, we need to do it in a way that takes God seriously, right? And so the story I'm going to share is one that I tried to make sense of *in light of all I know about what God says about me.*

### ***Bible:***

And there is no faith-reflection, no “making faith-sense” without the Bible. Passages were read to us from 1 Peter and Hebrews--and there are so many others like them. Passages that point to what we're talking about today, which is our need to persist in faith, guard this relationship with God that we've been given.

In Ephesians 5 we hear the charge to ***“Be very careful...how you live—not as unwise but as***

***wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."***

Paul tells us in Galatians 6, ***"Don't be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow. Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."***

We might remember something similar from Romans: ***"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."***

It would not be hard to find other passages. I could proof-text all day, because when it comes to the text, the proof our faith is in its endurance, in keeping faith beyond just a moment of belief. We need to persist in faith, guard this relationship with God that we've been given. And as far as what was read to us this morning, Peter was writing to a group of Christians who are

deeply suffering for their faithfulness to Jesus, and they're suffering in a way that is more significant than those churches that received the letter to the Hebrews, who writes there "You have not suffered to the point of spilling blood."

And Peter's basic message is this: persist in faithfulness, and do it in community, do it in the power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that death is coming and life will end: but you must stay faithful.

### **A Story:**

And so: A story.

During the winter of 2011 we had mice. They were in our garage especially, but our basement, too; I told myself only in unfinished places. But even I didn't buy it.

And I would catch them in these live traps that I bought for too much money and release them far away, near some railroad tracks. And I did this a number of times until I didn't anymore--there were no more mice to catch. And the traps sat in my garage, one on top of the other, in a corner. I would check them now and then and they were always empty, and they just sort of sat there amid the mess, you know--and now and then I'd notice them, and maybe open them up just to see, and they'd be empty or now and then I'd not notice them, see right through them, and

they sat there, just one more garage thing, if you know what I mean. And if you don't... please come help me clean my garage.

And on one of the warmer nights, after Bo had gone to sleep and while Carolyn was doing some work, I was organizing some things in the garage and I saw a mouse! So I ran to grab the traps, and I did, and set them down, and lifted them open to put birdseed inside--because what mouse can't resist birdseed, right?--and inside the traps were dead mice.

A few of them, actually. They had crawled inside the traps and starved to death sometime over winter, and were left there.

### ***Some Things Here:***

It was a long winter, filled with all sorts of troubles, and I had grown used to seeing-but-not-seeing those traps. I noticed them, but took as given that it was fine if they were overlooked, because they would be as they were the last time I checked in on them.

And of course, some of us may think--"Big deal". A good mouse in your garage is a dead mouse in your garage. But that's neither here nor there, nor is it the point of the story.

The point is that these things that I had not checked in on--because there were more pressing things to do,

and because I had come to believe that they were just fine as they had always been fine--they became home to pain and death and decay.

I had not attended to them, and they became home to pain and death and decay--right under my nose--and when I needed them, called upon them as resources, turned to depend on them--they were unusable, and I was left empty handed in my need.

### ***Checking In:***

We may be, in our lives, assuming things about how we are doing when it comes to this life of faith, and in the process, no longer checking in--not checking in with the Spirit in prayer, with the church in significant, trusting conversation, with Scripture in thoughtful reading. We may be rolling on old assumptions about how faithful our perspectives and our habits are, because there was a season in our past--recent or long ago--when we checked in a lot, but that season is in the past now, some distance away behind us, and because life has gotten busy--with work and play and rest and relationships--it's just simply the case that we haven't really made time for prayer in any significant way, for awhile. We haven't really had a heart-to-heart with anyone for ages, or with anyone who loves us enough to tell us when our heart smells a little ripe--or maybe we're just so far removed from our hearts that the idea of that sort of conversation makes no sense. Maybe we haven't really made time for scripture

beyond what we hear on Sunday.

I don't know.

***Past Seasons:***

I'd like it if this morning could be, for those of us who need it, something like discovering dead mice have been rotting in the corner of your garage.

In the best way, I mean: I hope it can be something that forces us to consider when the last time we really checked in with God in a meaningful, personal, and receptive way happened.

Because I know that many of us have had seasons of zealous pursuit of God. We have had "mountain top experiences"--as our Christian lingo puts it--we have had seasons of disciplined faithfulness, and significant self-reflection and a desire to overcome sin and the devil's snares.

But I don't know how much God cares about our past faithfulness. I just don't know. I know it was pleasing to him at the time; but I don't know how it plays into today. I know that we can all learn habits that are positive, that are Christian in some sense, and they can carry us forward for a long long time without us ever having to look deeply at our own lives, opinions, or behaviors. I don't know how long the steam we gather from the seasons of discipline and self-

reflection and honest prayer lasts to carry us forward. But I do know that it does run out, and will someday.

Our past disciplines--our prayers, our confession, our fasting and reading and service--they are, frankly, always in the past, and if we don't attend to the present--check-in with the Lord in the ways that we need to--then death and decay may result in places inside our souls that we have simply forgotten about. Even as we notice them. Even as we see them, and look through them, past them.

And unlike traps--put out of sight and out of mind--we carry our souls with us everywhere we go, and decay ends up being public no matter how tightly we seal it away inside ourselves. If we don't attend to matters of the soul now, when we're able, check-in with the Lord, and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to us through Scripture what it is we need to turn away from and turn to--if we don't do this, the mess is going to come out somewhere.

### ***Revelations:***

It may reveal itself in short words, irritability. It may come out in some persistent lack of trust. It may stink like pride, look like a growing conviction that our way is the high way of the Lord when it's really just not, and we're wrong about things we think we're right about. We may freeze in places we should act in, flee from trouble we should pray for, or fight in the place of



God, who fights for us.

Spiritual decay may not mean some great fall, some wide-open embrace of sin; it may mean that we look just like other people, ones who don't care about God, and live just like them. And that's a failure, of course, when we Christians are to be windows into new creation, visible living acting speaking witnesses to a resurrected Jesus and God's saving work for the world through Him. We can't give up on the single note that sounds through all the New Testament, which is the call to not give up. To keep on keeping on. To check in with the God who loves us, and wants to love the world through us, and with us. This life of faith is a life of not-seeing-through things, not taking for granted the fact that old seasons or acts of faithfulness are enough to keep us moving forward.

I don't want what the Spirit has borne in each of us to pass away from neglect. And if we think that this message is for someone else, then it is my guess it is for us, because for everyone of us there is more of Christ that God wants to see in our lives.

### ***Conclusion:***

We need to all be able to say with Paul, when death seems certain, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." And while none of us knows when our end may come, and so we must guard that good fight while we can, we each of

us do know just how little steam we may be running on. We know the sin that we've decided not to turn away from. We know the ways we've neglected to check in with God who loves us, and wants to bless us so that we might bless the world. We know.

Take today, take this moment, take the time you need to take to check in with God in a way that will keep death and pain and decay far, far away from your souls. Do whatever you have to do to persist in faithfulness, and not neglect those things that have drawn you close to God's hand.

Live well, in the freedom and power of the Spirit, and pray that we all might each of us see ourselves clearly, and not look past the hard things, but face them in the love of God.

And whatever happens in your day, whatever weird things come along in this life, try to make faith sense of them. Let the stuff of God help determine how you respond to what life brings. One way to keep on keeping on, to ensure that we check into our faithfulness and live lives pleasing to God is simply to take the stuff of every day, lay it out before the Lord, and ask God, "How do I make sense of this?" and "What can this teach me about you?" Only good can come when we do this, no matter what inaugurates that reflection.