

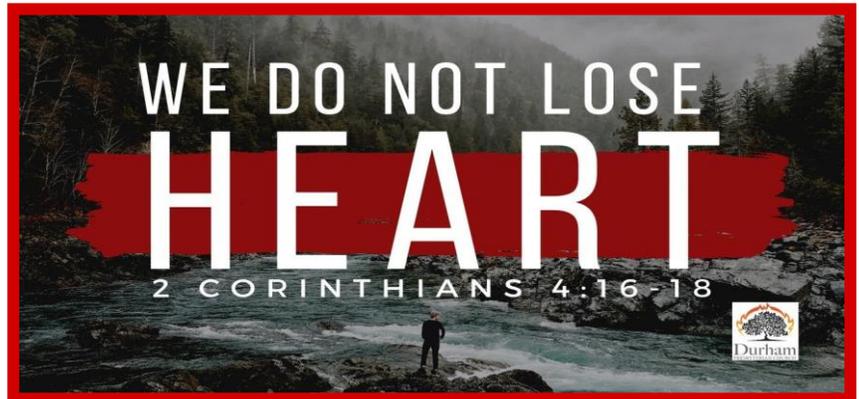
My Sermon from Sunday February 27, 2022, 'Last Sunday After The Epiphany' ~

"We Do Not Lose Heart"

Through the written word, and through the spoken word, may we know your living word, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

"We do not lose heart."
2 Corinthians 4:2

This is my verse for this week, written by the Apostle Paul in his second letter to



Christians in Corinth. *"We do not lose heart."* (2 Corinthians 4:1)

All this week our hearts have been with the people of Ukraine as they are being invaded by Russia under the direction of their President Vladimir Putin. The photos of terrified families sheltering in the subways in Kyiv reminds me of 'The Blitz' in London during World War II when the Nazis were bombing London.

There is a sign on the outer gate of the Concentration Camp Auschwitz. This death camp was operated by Nazi German in occupied Poland during World War II. Over 1 million people died in this camp.

The sign is in German and here are the 3 words on the sign:

ARBEIT MACHT FREI

In English, this means.
"Work will free you"
or *"Work sets you free."*



This saying was the ultimate betrayal of humanity, as the prisoners were put into the gas chambers or worked to death. It was only death that set them free, nothing else.

"ARBEIT MACHT FREI. WORK SETS YOU FREE."

There is defiance and courage in this particular sign. It was made by Polish political prisoners in 1940. Please take a look at the letter "B" in the first word, 'Arbeit.'



You will notice that the B doesn't look quite right. In fact, the prisoners made it upside down. The large part of the B is at the top of the letter and the small part of the B is at the bottom of the letter. The letter B was intentionally reversed. I celebrate this act for freedom.

This phrase reminds us of Jesus' words that are recorded in John's gospel:

"The truth will make you free."
(John 8:32)

This is a beautiful statement as we know as believers that Jesus is the truth and that when we turn to him, we are set free.

We in Canada are blessed with many freedoms ~ freedom to speak our minds, freedom to practice our Christian faith, freedom to protest. The recent Canada convoy protest called themselves the "FREEDOM" protesters. They believe that their freedoms of choice, especially with regard to the COVID protocols, were taken away from them. In addition, right wing extremist groups were

spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation. The protestors were cleared after 3 weeks of paralyzing downtown Ottawa.

I think it is ironic that they feel they have lost their freedom, when I feel that we are truly blessed in Canada with remarkable freedom. Where there is true and real danger of losing freedom is in the Ukraine with the recent and continuing and growing invasion by Russia. I find it terrifying that all men between the ages of 18 and 60 are no longer allowed to leave the country as they will most likely be called into service to fight for their freedom.

Where we have the ultimate freedom is through the Spirit of the Lord. The glory of the Lord. The light of God.

Today is the last Sunday before Lent begins this coming Wednesday, March 2, on "**Ash Wednesday.**" And today we remember the glory of God, the glory in which we share. This gives us strength to take a deep breath and begin Lent in just 3 days. During Lent we take on spiritual disciplines and we journey with Christ to his cross. What keeps us going is the knowledge and the truth that there is glory at the end, and we know that the cross is not the end but a sign that leads us to the resurrection.

God's glory was manifested and seen by Moses. The 10 Commandments were inscribed on two stone tablets and given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Whenever Moses came down from the mountain after encountering God and speaking with God, Moses' face was shining so brightly with the glory of the Lord that he had to cover his face. We read in the Book of Exodus that ***"the skin on his face shone because Moses had been talking with God."*** Exodus 24:30

The brilliant light on his face frightened the people and they wouldn't even come near him. Moses then decided to put a veil over his face whenever he returned down the mountain where he had been speaking with God.

We see God's glory, this divine light, in the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain. Jesus goes up

the mountain to pray with 3 of his disciples ~ Peter, James, and John. While praying, Jesus is transfigured and the appearance of his face changes. He shines with the glory of the Lord and his divinity shines through. Even his clothing becomes *“dazzling white.”* Luke 9:29

Years later, Paul would write to the Christians in Corinth that God writes his new covenant of love and salvation on our hearts and not on stone tablets. And because of our turning to Christ, each of us shines with the glory of the Lord.

The veil is removed from our hearts and from our minds. And we are all transformed through the Spirit of the Living God. In an earlier letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote that *“now we see as in a mirror, dimly”* (1 Cor 13:12). The reason why the people only saw dimly in mirrors is because mirrors were made of polished bronze and the reflection would have been dim or hazy. Paul used the mirror as a wonderful example of how our minds are unveiled through the freedom we receive from turning to Jesus. We begin to see clearly.

Paul writes *“and it is within the Spirit of the Lord that we have freedom.”* 2 Corinthians 3:17

And it is within this freedom, within the glory of the Lord that we come together to worship God and to be transformed. And it is within the Spirit of the Lord that we shine and are transformed. And it is within the Spirit of the Lord that we pray for the people of the Ukraine.

Here is the ‘Prayer for Ukraine’ written by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby ~

“God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine today. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them. We pray for those with power over war or peace, for wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions. Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear, that you would hold and protect them. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of peace. Amen.”

Just as the USSR collapsed 30 years ago, and the Nazi reign of terror collapsed in 1945 when they lost the war, I believe that freedom will ultimately prevail.

It is not work that sets you free, but it is the truth that sets you free.

It is Christ sets you free.

We will live fully each day and *“we do not lose heart.”*

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

