

Readings: Luke 22:54-62; Exodus 16:1-3; Psalm 86:1-7; Matthew 11:28-30 & John 16:33; Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4

You know it is kind of ironic to me to talk about stress at the contemporary worship. For is has been probably this ministry that caused me most stress since we came here to Trinity. ☺ Andrea could tell you how many nights I couldn't fall asleep because I didn't have anyone to play or sing, or do the refreshments, or set up etc. Many times it was very stressful. And there were occasions when the question came up, is this all worth it? Or should we stop?

Well last year at the Youth Quake I talked to Peter Eide an incredible Contemporary Christian musician and I shared with him my struggles and he gave me some advice. He said if you want to be a good golfer, (it's ironic that he used this picture since I don't golf), but anyways, he said: if you want to be a good golfer, you need to know how to golf in the rain. In other words, he said preserve in your ministry despite the fact it is challenging and stressful. For we're not supposed to serve God only in good times when things go well, but as well in the tough times when we don't know what the next day will bring. And so I listen to him. I preserved together with all of you and look where we are now. (In the sanctuary again.) But seriously...

If you think about stress, and what is causing it, it is usually something that is out of our control. Something that might seem difficult to do or overcome. Something that needs to be done now, but there is no time, or when the relationship isn't going exactly how we'd like, or the money situation isn't what we'd expected. All these things cause stress in our lives.

But let me ask you a question: **“Is this really the reason that is behind our stress?”** Or is there a deeper reason, something behind the scenes. Well let's look at our first reading from Exodus. It is a very well known story about the Israelites traveling through the wilderness. We read that the Israelites had been traveling for about a month and a half. And then they started to complain: *‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’*

Are you cranky when you're hungry? I'm sure that 90 % of the arguments I have with my wife happen when we're both hungry. And so we hear about these Israelites, and they seem to be pretty stressed out about something. Well, let's see they are hungry, they are tired, they are in the dessert, traveling for almost two months in the wilderness, not knowing what will happen with them probably starting to doubt these two crazy dudes that are leading them, Moses and Aaron. Would their circumstances qualify as stressful? Would you be stressed out in their situation? Well of course we would.

And see sometimes our situation is similar to the one the Israelites were in. Sometimes we're hungry and irritated, sometime we're traveling through our lives, and it seems like we're in the dessert, tired out by all the things that are happening. Do we know where we're going? Do we know what will happen the next day? Many times we don't. And we don't even have Moses to lead us and to tell us it's going to be ok.

But one more time, I want to ask a question: **“Are all these things we named the reason for stress in our lives, or is there a deeper reason that lies behind?”** For see the problem for Israelites, wasn't necessary the lack of food, or tiredness. And we know that it is not usually the biggest issue for us either. **What caused the stress in the lives of the Israelites was the lack of trust.** They failed to trust God for help. They freaked out and even went as far as to say, that they rather been slaves back in Egypt. What causes stress in our lives? It is not the stressful circumstances. They will always be there. Life will not go smoothly all the time, we already know that, but **stress overcomes us in those kinds of situations, when we stop trusting God. When we stop believing that he is in charge, that he will help us, has a plan for us, that he will deliver us and that the ultimate victory belongs to him. That is the first and probably most common reason for stress.**

The Israelites were traveling to the Promised Land and that is where we're headed. The road might be stressful at times, but if we know where we're going and if we can trust the one who has gone before us, if we're able to see this bigger picture and God's plan for us, why should we stress out. This life, the things around us, it's all in God's hands.

See our first reading talks about that as well. Peter and his denial. Can you imagine more stressful situation? Jesus was arrested, shortly after Peter promised he'll never deny him

and now things are getting out of hands, Jesus is being dragged to the high priest's house and Peter is trying to fulfill his promise as he's following the crowd. But he's afraid, he stands back and people are starting to recognize him as one of Jesus' followers. And they are starting to ask him questions. And Peter three times in the row says: I don't know him. **See often times stress can be a result of our own doing. When we sin we bring the stress of painful consequences upon ourselves.**

One could ask what caused Peter more stress, the fact that he was asked these unpleasant questions or the fact that he denied his Lord. I am positive that after the denial Peter experienced many sleepless nights. (Pause) **Do you see the actions and words or maybe even thoughts that are causing you stress in your lives?** Probably the best advice would be if you're stressed out about painful consequences of something you're about to do, or say, don't do it. Peter realized that, but it was "too late." He had to pay his price.

But of course it doesn't end here. And this is not the end of Peter's story either. **And so what do we do when we're in stressful situations? How can we deal with all the stress that surrounds us?** We hear the answers in our second set of readings. And the first and very obvious advice God's word gives us for stressful times is **to call upon the Lord**. King David in the toughest times of his life wrote the most amazing psalms.

Do we call upon the Lord? Do we seek his help when we're under stress, or are we trying to do it all by ourselves? Well I can tell you honestly, that I try to do it for the most time by myself, and thus the sleepless nights. But our God is a living God, he wants a relationship with us and very important part of a relationship is conversation. God comes to us says: I see you're under a lot of stress lately, TALK TO ME. Let me know what is going on in your life. Let it out, get it off your chest. Trust me and things will be good again.

In Matthew 11 we read those well known words: *Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* Jesus says whatever you're dealing with in your life don't do it on your own, don't get all stress out without proper help. Come to me and I will give you rest. If you'll take my yoke upon you, meaning if you take my advice, my wisdom, my Spirit and make it a part of your life, the burdens will seem much lighter, for you'll be carrying them with my help. In John 16 we read: *In the world you face persecution. But take*

courage; I have conquered the world!' Jesus is helping us to understand and to see the bigger picture. No matter how much stress the world around you causes you, don't worry for I have conquered the world, with all its stress, with all its problems, even with the death itself. The overall victory belongs to me.

And it is especially in the tough times when God gives us the most incredible opportunity to witness about his power in our lives. For people around us are watching how we deal with stressful situations, and our faith and behavior can change lives of those around us. There is no doubt about the fact that the Christianity grew so rapidly in the first century because Christians were able to outlove everyone else. They were able to trust God in midst of the most stressful situations and people around them saw it. They realized the greater power behind their convictions, words and actions.

And so in the midst of stress of our everyday lives let us endure and preserve in our journey with Christ. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans says: *We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.* As long as we'll be able to live these words out, and despite the stress in our lives trust our God, calling upon him, letting him to help us with our burdens, God is not going to let us down. As long as we'll be willing to golf in the rain, he'll bless our lives and fill them with peace and hope only he can give.

Amen