

Clouds & Fire

Scripture: Exodus 13:20 – 22 and Philippians 4:4 - 9

July 16th, 2023

Wouldn't it be nice to know which way to go all the time? Wouldn't it be nice to have direction always in life? Wouldn't it be nice to know which way our church should go to continue our service to Jesus Christ? Wouldn't it be nice?!

Today's scripture passage from Exodus illustrates this kind of guidance and direction. God sent a cloud each day to guide the Israelites and He sent a pillar of fire each night to show the Israelites where they needed to go. Clouds by day, pillars of fire by night – if only God would do that today?

Wouldn't it be nice if God showed each of us the way with a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night? Wouldn't it be nice if God showed you & me the way with a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night?

Though the signs were clear, the Israelites still had to put great faith in the system that God had designed for them. Though the signs were clear, the Hebrew people had to trust in God's way and direction. To get to their destination, they needed to trust that the clouds and fire would not lead them astray. To get to the Promised Land, they had to obey God's clouds and fire.

It occurs to me that GPS systems, computerized maps, and a variety of other technological tools are in many ways our modern day clouds and pillars of fire.

(Bring range finder from golf bag)

This is a range finder for golfing. I mainly use it now to find how many yards to the pin or to find my golf ball – it acts sometimes like a telescope on the course.

A range finder on a golf course is in some way like God's clouds and fire. They lead us exactly to where we need to go. They require us to put our faith in them so that they will not lead us astray.

The real challenge comes for us when our destination is not a physical one but a spiritual one. What if we need to take a journey through grief, is our faith strong enough to survive? What if we need to take a journey out of a relationship which is more harm than helpful, is our faith strong enough to go through a difficult break up? What if we need to travel through an illness that takes our quality of life away from us, is our faith strong enough to survive the illness or maybe even face death? What if we need to travel through a change of career or retirement, is our faith strong enough to make it through?

These destinations are not found on a map! There is no GPS system equipped to show us where to go and what turns to take. Is our faith strong enough to survive?

It is in these journeys when we look for the cloud and the fire in unexpected places. It is in these journeys when we look for the voice of a trusted advisor who speaks God's truth to us. It is in these journeys when we need to look at scripture. It is in these journeys when we need to look for the intuition God gave us. It is in these journeys when we look for the still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

Though these things are not as obvious as the fire and the cloud, they are just as trustworthy. When we put our trust in God, we can be sure that God will lead us where we need to go!

Let me repeat that - When we put our trust in God, we can be sure that God will lead us where we need to go!

Do you know that I think one of the most important things we are looking for today is 'PEACE'!

In my AP Calculus class that I taught for many years, this class would produce a lot of anxiety for my students. At the end of the class my students would take an AP test to see if they could receive a college credit for the course. There was a lot of pressure on the students and this pressure gave them much anxiety! I did have a 60% success rate for the students I taught who would receive on a five point scale a 3 or 4 which meant they got a college credit for course and if they got a five, they would receive two college credits!

Oh, those students would do the assigned work and practice hard to take the exam. I would always tell them to memorize the formulas and learn how to apply them. They did not really need to understand how it all works. Just trust that the formulas work! Many took my advice and did well!

Sometimes our lives mirror an AP Calculus class. We pay attention and work hard, but the solutions to life's problems elude us and our anxiety level soars as we struggle to understand our circumstances.

In our second scripture reading this morning we have good advice about anxiety. The formula for peace that we all are looking for is – bring all our requests to God. Did you hear that – the formula for peace is to bring all our request to God!

We do not need to lean on our limited understanding to overcome our circumstances. All we need to do is apply God's Word to our lives and trust God!

This can be very hard to do because we always want to solve the problems of life. But all we need to do is apply God's Word in our lives and trust in God.

Let us pray:

God of clouds and fire, thank you for the signs that show us the way to go. O God, we do often wish these signs were more obvious to us, but we do thank you for your guidance and example.

Help us to trust that these signs will get us to our destination, even if we can not see it.

O God, help us to trust you and your Word as the source of peace in our lives. May we in trust in Jesus. AMEN.