

# Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC

April 3, 2016

## **“Soul Security”**

“the doors of the house where the disciples met  
were locked for fear of the Jews ...”

John 20:19

### **Prelude**

This morning I want to address a subject  
I'm calling “soul security.”

We sing a hymn occasionally,  
composed by Anthony Johnson Showalter (1858-1924),  
called “What a Covenant” (*NCH*, No. 471).  
It was originally entitled “What a Fellowship.”  
Showalter was inspired by a passage from  
Deuteronomy 33:27 - which once was translated:

**“The eternal God is thy refuge,  
and underneath are the everlasting arms”**  
(Deuteronomy 33:27a).

It is said that Showalter had two close friends,  
recently widowed, and in writing them sympathy  
notes (which is an important and encouraging  
gesture for us to extend to others in a time of grief),  
he quoted the passage from Deuteronomy.

Underneath are the everlasting arms  
of the eternal God.

Showalter had the music in mind, but needed verse,  
so he reached out and collaborated with  
Elisha Hoffman (1839-1929). Hoffman was nothing  
if not prolific in writing verse suited for singing.  
I learned this week that there are over 2,000 Hoffman  
hymns in print; he was one singing Presbyterian!  
He served a church in Benton Harbor, Michigan, for 33 years,  
not so far from us really. Not so far at all.

“I Must Tell Jesus,” “Is Your All on the Altar,”  
are two of Hoffman's hymns I know.  
And “What a Fellowship.”

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms.  
What a blessedness, what a peace in mine,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Leaning, leaning,  
    safe and secure from all alarms;  
leaning, leaning,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms.

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Safe and secure – from all alarms.

This is a grand hope, isn't it?  
Safe and secure – from all alarms.  
I'm not sure I have yet arrived  
    at such a state.  
I consider it an outlook on life  
    informed by faith;  
it is a strong conviction to hold  
    in an uncertain world;  
it is a state of being that comes  
    when we walk, and talk, and  
    lean on Jesus.

Safe and secure – from all alarms.

This is soul security for which I yearn;  
the state of being aligned with life;  
and this, I believe, is one of our most urgent  
tasks in the church – to nurture and cultivate  
soul security in such a manner that it is  
good for us, good for others.

We have lots of security concerns,  
    for there is much that makes us  
    anxious and uneasy.

Just to be clear:  
the subject is soul security.

Not social security – that comes with a  
Nine-digit number often asked for,  
but that we aren't supposed to surrender  
for fear of theft.

Not home security: with gates and codes  
and cameras; alarms, bells, whistles.  
I live with a head full of home security codes  
that permits or prevents entry depending  
upon whether I can remember the right code.  
If I can't sequence my numbers properly,  
I'm denied access to the parking lot;  
I may be able to enter the building elevator,  
but it will not deliver me to the floor I choose  
without the code; I'll not move up or down.  
Even my own front door (keyless)  
requires yet another code.  
I'm very secure in my home -  
except when I'm not.

Not financial security,  
that comes, I suppose, when you  
have more than you need,  
sufficient to insure protection  
from catastrophe, from ruin,  
from unexpected "acts of God"  
that spell disaster.

Not email account security,  
protected by password  
so difficult to hack  
you can't remember it.  
And not mobile phone security,  
with encryption that government can't break  
and Apple won't disclose.

Not border security,  
so only the "good guys" get in.

Rather, let us speak of soul security,  
being safe and secure from all alarms.

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During the past few weeks  
we've been so immersed with  
Lent and Holy Week,  
and our capital campaign,  
Here, for Good,  
that I feel we've neglected

some events that are important  
for us to address.

Bear with me in this.

Many terrorist attacks have rightly put people on edge. We need to be careful, though, that we not be selectively concerned. And concerned we are, offering our prayers and encouragement to those in

- Paris
- San Bernadino
- Brussels

to name just a few.

But concerned also for those in Ankara in Turkey with 37 killed and hundreds injured (March, 2016);

And the beachside killings on the Ivory Coast, West Africa, where gunmen randomly targeted and killed people enjoying their time at a resort.

And on Sunday, this past Easter, in Lahore, Pakistan, 74 people killed, over 300 injured, in a suicide blast in a crowded park. This attack was intentionally directed at Christians. Yet ironically, the majority of victims were Muslim, many women, along with 17 children (see *Global Ministries leaders reach out to partners*, ucc.org, March 30, 2016, written by Connie Larkman).

And concerned also about the “terror” that reigns in the Holy Land, when Palestinians stab or crash to harm Israelis; when Israelis gun down the Palestinians they occupy.

When blood is spilled under any of these circumstances, in any of these places, it “cries from ground” (Genesis 4:10), and we, as human beings, are called to account.

Permit a couple of thoughts on this. Like it not, we find ourselves in a time that requires us to be savvy and wise, as alert as we are prepared.

The Deacons of the church have been charged with updating our “emergency preparedness plan” here at Plymouth. We’ve had such a plan but it is currently being updated. And it spells out appropriate actions; where to seek shelter, when to evacuate, what to do if we encounter

- medical emergency;
- fire emergency;
- tornado and/or severe weather.

It also includes a section with an action plan in case we would ever experience a **“Hostile intruder.”**

Our intent is to be prepared; prepared, but without being paranoid – or undone by suspicions we may project upon others we may not know, who we may not understand.

I do want to caution us, that we not submit to the messaging that comes with the narrow filters of our media. There is a popular message that we in the U.S, that we, “in the West,” need fear and beware those from the East who intend us harm because of hate. Also, that we need pause, withhold a welcome, to those seeking refuge in our midst, for fear they might come with twisted malicious intent to destroy the beauty of our national fabric.

This in part accounts for some, such as our governor, who would refuse Hoosier hospitality to Syrian refugees. It is too great a risk, threatening state security.

So I want to caution us, and urge that we carefully parse those voices that may pander to our fears, and play upon our insecurities. And I further urge that we resist the appeal of fellow Christians in this country who peddle fear, indeed some who proclaim their persecution, who argue a war is being waged upon their freedom.

This took place yet again this past week –

a “Texas Values” organization got press alleging that **“corporate giants like Apple, Disney, the NCAA, Intel have come out of the closet and declared public war on the religious freedom of clergy and religious schools”** (MSNBC. com; 4/1/2016).

And it is not just Texas values that bring discredit upon our Easter faith. We have our own Indiana values: God, guns, no birth control, unconscionable intrusions into women’s health care, and a passion for doing away with affordable health care.

How this ever got wrapped up and purveyed in a religion based upon compassion, neighborly care, and charity, is beyond me. But this is what we have to deal with. And we would hope to do so with thoughtful prayer and human reverence, serving the God who desires that we “fear not.”

Let me remind -

Harry Emerson Fosdick preached his sermon, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in 1922. Fosdick outlined what it was to be a “modernist;” to be a Christian trying to keep current, to be up to date. We would call it progressive in our day, but back then, “modernist” had currency. For all his brilliance he was subjected to an examination of theological beliefs in an ecclesiastical court (Presbyterian). He avoided a verdict only by resigning from his pastorate.

So let us remember:

**New occasion teach new duties,  
time make ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still and onward,  
Who keep abreast of truth**  
(James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891).

We pray to “keep abreast of truth,” to discern the new occasions that teach new duties. And let us seek to avoid, and if we can’t avoid, then contest, those recalcitrant religious forces that work to disturb, rather than instill, peace.

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Which brings me to our gospel lesson.

The risen Christ comes speaking peace  
to disciples locked in a house  
with doors locked for fear.

They were locked in a state of fear  
of some other.

And they were delivered,  
the state was altered, only when  
Jesus showed up speaking "Peace."

That's the qualifier. That's the key.  
That's the disclosure. The real deal.

Jesus comes speaking "Peace."  
And when he comes, his gift is the whisper,  
the word we need for soul security.

Grace is the heart to receive it.  
Wisdom is the gift to understand it.  
Joy is the gift of experiencing it.  
Song is the gift of proclaiming it.

You wrap it all together -  
and you have soul security.  
Being safe and secure - from all alarms.

This is what we are invited to share together  
when we share together the love and peace  
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we live it, and breath it, and pass it on ...  
for there are many whose lives are in need of it.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,  
for the demands of the day are many;  
so be charitable as you read; and remember:  
the contents of this sermon have not been edited  
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*