Sermon – November 24, 2024 – "Home & Stillness"
by Rev. Dale Carl Fredrickson

A few days after the public spectacle known as the Jake Paul versus Mike Tyson fight, I went down a social media rabbit hole.

In case you missed last week's boxing phenomenon, Jake Paul is a social media personality and a tireless promoter of himself, his brand, and his new career as a self-proclaimed boxer. He is 27 years old and began his career as a Vine and then YouTube content creator, Social Media influencer, Actor for a Disney series, and now a Boxer.

What stood out to me about the Boxing event was the entrance. Jake Paul entered the arena in the back seat of a purple-over-lime-green Chevy C3500 with his brother Logan Paul and European trophy girlfriend. Phil Collins' "In The Air Tonight" played through the car's speakers.
I can feel it coming in the air tonight Oh, Lord.
And I've been waiting for this moment for all my life
Oh, Lord. Tyson entered alone: Black boxing shorts and a hoodie.

What shook me out of my state of what they call "doom scrolling" was learning that Jake Paul owns a seven-million-dollar watch—not one, two, three, four, five, or even six, but a seven-million-dollar watch. The Jacob & Co. Billionaire Ashoka is an 18K white gold watch with over 300 Ashoka-cut diamonds.

What is an Ashoka cut diamond? An Ashoka cut diamond is a rare, rectangular diamond with rounded corners and 62 facets. Ashoka diamonds are rare because they require a large, flawless, rough diamond at least three carats in size. Less than 1% of rough diamonds mined annually can be cut into an Ashoka.

He owns a $16 million mansion in Puerto Rico and an extraordinary collection of cars, including Lamborghinis, Rolls Royce, and Mercedes, valued at $2 million. However, I still can't comprehend a $7 million watch.

Transition: This dive into Jake Paul's world left me feeling disheartened. As I scrolled, hope, enthusiasm, and courage left my body. Is this the best example of the world social media has created? What does day about us as Americans? Have you ever felt disheartened? And then, my week got worse, so let me offer a few more scenes…..

My daughter had a dance contest earlier this week, and I was amazed by these young women's creativity, movement, and skill. So much goes into these competitions: choreography and music selection., costume design, and hours of practice. And then they give out these trophies, and I know I am a naïve dance dad. Still, how they hype these award ceremonies, announcing the last place and slowly moving up, totally heightened the comparisons and judgments between dance teams and the girls themselves. Then comes the gossip, and before you know it, I'm like, the beauty of the event is lost.

And then, as I drove home from the dance competition with my daughter's boyfriend and my 4-year-old son, we saw a "Trump Street Corner Celebration." This was not your pre-election, trying to convince people who haven't voted yet. It was something different. I

watched some cars “beep” and others "wave," while some just "scowled." Some used inappropriate hand gestures, which I found interesting. My daughter’s boyfriend asked; “What is going on here?” When I got home, I googled it, thinking maybe I had missed something. Then, I resorted to asking my beloved mother-in-law, a registered Republican. And she said it plainly to me: “All that type of celebration does is stir up resentment and hard feelings that are already there.

And then, I get to watch my son’s basketball game as they stream it live from Kansas. And guess what? I watch as nobody passes the ball. Everybody seems content to shoot, shoot, shoot. Nobody plays good defense and finds joy in being a good teammate.

And then, like thunder and lightning, I realize: Oh, no, now I’m becoming a grumpy old man.

In summary, we’ve got a 27-year-old YouTube influencer turned boxer who bought a 7-million-dollar watch, a Dance competition that loses sight of young women's creative brilliance, political gloating, and selfish basketball.

But then, The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued war-crime arrest warrants for both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leader Ibrahim Al-Masri. The ICC is an intergovernmental organization and an international court that has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.
The court judged that “starvation” was used as a war tactic. This means that food, water, and basic health care needs were strategically withheld from civilians to stage public attacks against the citizens of Gaza.

Transition: Have you ever felt disheartened? Then, I remembered that story about Jesus inviting his Disciples to get into the boat. Do you remember it?

Jesus initiates the action, “Let us go over to the other side” (4:35). They leave the crowd behind, and then comes the storm. Mark’s Gospel describes the storm with such vivid details. It was not simply a minor storm but “A furious squall,” and then “the waves broke over the boat,” and the boat was “nearly swamped (4:37b).” And here’s some ancient humor. Jesus is asleep in the back of the small ship. The disciples, rightly so, are afraid that they will drown. They shout at Jesus: “Don’t you care? (4:38b)”

If I’m candid, I’ve been there, haven’t you? Asking Jesus, crying out to God about the state of the world: “Don’t you care?”

It dawned upon me this week that we’re in a storm. The waters of our world are raging, and we’re rowing in the boat with a lot of fear because we’re all afraid we might go down this time. What I hadn’t noticed before is this: Jesus is the one who got us into this mess. If I’m reading the story right, Jesus initiates the action and invites us into the storm. The church comprises those of us who have said “Yes.” We have said “Yes” to following Jesus even into the “eye of the storm.”

A few years ago, I drove the church van on Highway 395 between Big Pine and Lone Pine. We had just finished a fantastic service trip in McDermott, Nevada, where we served a

Native American Reservation. We were tired, and as I drove, I saw the dark clouds emerge and burst wide open. As the rain poured down the mountainsides, I watched mud form and begin to pour over the concrete guard rails like lava. It was one of my life's most simultaneous, fascinating, and fear-filled moments. One adult leader in the driver's seat yelled, “Dale. Dale.” I turned that van around as teenagers screamed, and we barely made it back to Big Pine before they closed the highway.

We were in the storm and had to make quick decisions. My adult leaders took out maps and checked for alternative routes on their iPhones. Two high school seniors took my church credit card and got our group pizza and soda. We decided to call our students’ parents and get a hotel for the night. We booked the last room in the town. As the alarm blared for the volunteer fire department and people in the city checked on us, many had to spend the night in the high school gym. My greatest joy was seeing our group come together. Nothing was ideal on that night, and our group could have complained, fought with each other, or even given up. But late that night, as we processed the day, the room was filled with gratitude that we were together, that we were safe, and that we had just come from a service trip that made our world better for others.

The good news is that—as paradoxical as it may sound—our healing and wholeness, our transformation as citizens of planet Earth, come through storms. Jesus is guiding us through the storm. Jesus invites us to go through the storm; we don’t get it easy, we don’t get the pass, and our world is often troubling. We don’t get the rescue. Instead, we get this profound sense of invitation to go into the heart of human existence, to enter by blood, sweat, and tears into each other's pain and the world's pain. There is no alternative but through the storm. The storm is where our transformation and communion with God lie.

The church is the place where we learn how to row together. But there’s more. The church is the place that prepares us for the storms. The church teaches us about our purpose, identity, and our belonging. Through the storms, we learn how we contribute meaningfully to the world and leave a positive impact—that’s purpose. Through the storm, we learned who we are in the community. We learned about self-perception, values, beliefs, and unique qualities—that’s identity. We also learned that we are not alone. We are connected to family, friends, and others who remind us of our sacred worth—that’s belonging.

Do you remember how the story ends? Jesus stumbles to the front of the boat and says to the wind and waves: Quiet! Be still (4:39)!” And then, he says, with a smile: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith (4:40)?” I don’t think Jesus was teasing his disciples. He was teaching them that everything worthwhile, meaningful, and beautiful is on the other side of the storm. What is required is that we keep rowing.

when ocean waves of pain
crash on the shores of life
seismic collisions not easing up
when your heart no longer sees
rays of light on the horizon
hope flickering almost giving up
when billowing dark clouds converge
and torrents of rain unsettle the ground
fears like shaky legs hard to stand up

hold on
it's always dark
before dawn
hold on
your soul
slow down
hold on
into silence
be drawn
hold on
through mystery
limp along
hold on
from death
new life comes

–Dale Carl Fredrickson