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READ PSALM 33:8-22. When my husband and I traveled to Washington D.C. recently, we had occasion to sit in the gallery in the House of Representatives for a short session of Congress. To open the session, the Chaplain prayed Psalm 33, closing his prayer in Jesus' name. I have to admit to being surprised—and delighted.

After the prayer, I looked around the room. Above the chair on the rostrum are the words **IN GOD WE TRUST**. Looking up at the ceiling of the house chamber, I see this inscription on a beautiful fresco: **E pluribus unum**. It means “out of the many, one.”

We saw these two mottos all over the city.

We went to the Washington National Cathedral. Its stained glass windows included these from the three branches of government: legislative, judicial, and executive.¹

The window of the judicial branch has a theme of moral guidance through the Temple and the Hebrew Torah. Without these, the people fell into idolatry, but when restored their moral code was restored. In the same way, we are morally guided by our Constitution through the acts of the Supreme Court.

The window of the executive branch shows the value of persistent faith. The Hebrews followed their leader, Moses, for forty years in the desert. Similarly, we place our faith in our president. Faith is represented in the red pillar of fire and blue and red pillar of clouds, representing God's faithfulness.

The window of the legislative branch depicts the story of The Good Samaritan. Its message is that those in Congress will provide a voice for the oppressed, the powerless, and those who are most in need, reflecting the values of our nation's founders.

We found representations of faith everywhere.

The Lincoln Memorial contains writings immersed in Christian theology and love for God, Lincoln's second Inaugural Address and the Gettysburg Address, which ends with these words: *“that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”*

Inscribed at the Jefferson Memorial is this question: *“God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?”*

Written on the pinnacle of the Washington Monument are these words, “Laus Deo!” “Praise be to God!” along with a prayer: *“that [God] would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to*

¹ You can find the windows by typing in your browser: washington national cathedral, windows of three branches of government, or by copying and pasting this: <http://www.anestingexperience.com/2011/01/gratias-tibi-ago-domine.html>

do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation.”²

Evidence of faith is all over this city.

But are inscriptions on buildings and monuments enough? Do we affirm these things and then just go about our job as if it is dependent on us, alone?

Psalm 33 says,

The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. From his throne he observes all who live on the earth. He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do. The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior. Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory-- for all its strength, it cannot save you (v. 13-17).

Faith matters. Faith is looking beyond ourselves for everything we do. Faith is “seeing God,” who is unseen, and recognizing God has great interest in what we do and how we do live. Faith is the most important, powerful commitment in life. What makes faith live?

We went with former members, Tom and Lois Harmon, to Tom’s hometown of Belleville, PA, an Amish/English community in Kishacoquillas Valley. Tom wanted us to experience some Amish life so introduced us to some classmates. One friend invited us over and shared his life story. He gave me permission to share it, so here is Sam’s story—not his real name.

He was raised Amish, and quit school after eighth grade, as is customary. At age 20 he married. At first, he and his wife rented a farm but he longed for his own, so they borrowed \$35,000, half from Amish friends and the other half from a bank, to purchase a farm. The couple worked hard to make ends meet, and live up to the rules and requirements of their Amish church. There were restrictions on how to farm which often cost him lost crops. Once he used a machine, and had to confess his sin to the church. It was the way things were. But inside, he did not feel it was wrong.

Not long after, his neighbor’s son burned his barn to the ground, with all his horses inside. When the teen was found out, he said he “just wanted to have some fun.” It was a heartbreaking loss. As Sam told us this story, tears trickled down his cheeks. He went on. The owner of the lumber company came and told him he would supply lumber free of charge. Eighty men showed up to help rebuild the barn and milk his cows in the interim and help him overcome.

A while later his grain was ready for harvest. It had to be cut and dried, which would take days, but there was a prediction of heavy rain coming in four days. There was no way to save his crop.

² “Now I make it my earnest prayer that God would have you and the State over which you preside, in His holy protection, that He would incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, to entertain brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow citizens and the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the field, and finally, that He would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation.”

He would lose it all and not be able to pay his bills. So he hired a neighbor to use a combine, which was not allowed, to bring in the crop before the rain.

Again, the bishop confronted his sin. Sam explained his reasoning. While the bishop personally agreed with him, he insisted that he still needed to confess his sin because he had broken the church's rules. Sam was troubled. He felt that paying his bills was more important. So he went to a friend and the friend told him, "Go find the most secret place you can and pray. But don't use your prayer book. Just talk to Jesus."

"I don't know how," he said.

"Just tell him like you've told me."

So Sam went inside his silo, climbed to the top and talked to the Lord—and something happened. He met Jesus. His heart was changed. And, he believed he was given confirmation that he was right. So he decided to confess simply that he had broken the church's rules. The church expelled he and his wife. From that time on they were shunned.

Now what? Living by faith was hard. He tried to do what he truly thought was right. He tried to listen to and follow Jesus. Determining not to give up his faith, he and his wife joined another church, which was Mennonite.

Sam did not stop living by faith, despite all these hardships. He continued to build his newfound relationship with Jesus and strive to follow him. Over the years Sam's Mennonite church began recognizing his deep faith and asked him to move to New York City as a missionary. He did not want to go! He was a country farmer with an eighth grade education. How could he make it in New York City? But he told the Lord he would do it. He was standing in awe of God. And the Lord confirmed to him it was his path so the couple moved. They were in their mid 50s.

He trained for chaplaincy at Columbia Hospital on 164th and Broadway. Most of his patients had AIDS. He learned he preached too much. One man threw him out of his room saying, "You don't understand me at all." But Sam didn't give up.

He kept going back to the man's room, determined to learn to listen. After a few times the guy said, "Okay, you can stay." He began telling Sam his whole life story, and then became interested in Sam's story. The man became a believer about a week before he died.

Many people have turned to faith through Sam's story. He has had things to learn, but he believes his living faith matters. He stands on it.

Psalm 33 says,

"The LORD watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine. We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name" (v. 18-21).

I share these things with you because it seems, with all the turmoil in our nation, if we would all walk in our faith with a humble, listening heart toward Jesus and others, and if our political leaders would simply look at the God signs that surround them and look to God rather than their own strength; then perhaps faith would become living and it would really make a difference.

You might see evidence of faith on walls, buildings, and in your church life. You have to take it down off the wall and out of the pages of the Bible and let it grow into life inside your heart, and allow it to spill out to all those around you.

Faith is the most powerful message in the world. What is your life story? Does your faith matter to others?

AMEN