

Sermon The F Bomb.
Olivet Church

Within us, there is an eternal landscape of predictable patterns,
but it is the landscape few have taken the time to explore or illuminate for themselves.

In middle school most of us learned that humans respond to conflict with a fight or flight reflex, and while that's true, it's only a small part of a true story.

Here is the rest,

When faced with conflict, the most basic and oldest part of the human brain is wired to respond in one of four ways, sometimes called the 4 "F"s. Or as I call it, the 'F' bomb.

We **fight, flee, freeze, or faint.**

We all know what this feels like,
and we only have to reach back as far as last week to see them at play.

In the Russian-Ukraine war,
some reacted with the urge to fight,
to stand up and demand a show of force,
to counter- dominate those we perceive trying to change the power structure.

Some reacted by **fleeing**,
we turned off the news,
ate copious amounts of food
or drank copious amounts of alcohol,
or whatever our numbing agent of choice,
so that we wouldn't have to deal with the painful and unpleasant story unfolding on our screens.

Some reacted by **freezing**.
We couldn't think of what to do about it, but we couldn't look away.
We were rooted to our phones, speechless, with static hissing in our brains where there once was the capacity for rational thought.

Some I know reacted by fainting.

For some of us, the input overload was, quite simply, too much,

and we might not even remember what we did.

Our bodies took over and we just shut off.

Fight, flee, freeze, faint.

These patterns are well traced,
and there is no shame in any of them.
It is how you have learned to keep yourself safe,
if not personally,
then on an evolutionary level,
and it is entirely understandable why you had the reaction you did, whatever it was.

This is not a sermon to say you did wrong, **it's a Sermon trying to help us understand.**

They are **two** things above which we need to understand:

first that many of us are slaves to these responses.
We go on automatic, and they take over...

But the second thing I know for sure is:

None of them do a thing towards peacemaking or conflict transformation.

They are, by design, reactions that will protect us and the systems we have created,
even when the protection is more harmful than the conflict.

In order to work for peace and understanding,
for tomorrow to be different from today, we have got to learn to transcend those four
reactions, the 'F bomb', to transcend **fight**, **flee**, **freeze**, and **faint** and that is not a
matter of willpower,
but a matter of research-based, intentional practice.

The research shows us there is only one way to transcend these automatic reactions,
and it is through the practice of mindfulness meditation. I am not exaggerating when I
say mindfulness is a superpower and a silver bullet.

I am convinced that when our scripture says that Jesus repeatedly went off to a solitary place to pray, this was his practice, because it is the only thing that can lead us to live the kind of gracious, peaceful, and reconciliatory life he managed to live.

The reason mindfulness is so powerful is that we practice, when we are focusing on a breath and a breathing meditation. We train our brains to see, rather than react to, our thoughts and feelings as they rise and fall, as they approach and pass by.

We train our brains against their automatic responses to attach or react against thoughts and feelings, and just watch them with curious compassion.

It is the difference between **standing in the rain and standing under an awning watching the rain –**

the difference between looking out from **inside of a cloud** and **standing on the ground** watching the clouds pass through a spacious sky.

Through the practice of mindfulness,

- we train ourselves to see the F. Bomb, before automatic reactions as they happen, and choose **not** to let them take over.
- We can see them **without** attachment or aversion,
- and once we are out of it, we can start the **vital** work of asking questions.
- We can start to try to understand what's going on in ourselves and in others?
- We can start to be curious about what we are really afraid of and why,
- What are they really afraid of and why?
- We can start investigating **what** watered the seeds of suffering in front of us,
- **how** we can **stop** watering them,

and **what** we can do to water **different** seeds.

Third Isaiah (Chapters 40-66) shows the people of Israel's return from exile in Babylon.

Third Isaiah, where our scripture comes from today, was primarily composed after those exiles returned home—something they had desired for generations.

Yet as we see when we read it, all was not well when that homecoming finally took place.

The exiles returned from Babylon to a city in ruins,
a place devastated by war and capture, and they felt impoverished and disillusioned.

After all, they had just wanted a new start and for life to finally get back to the old normal again.

From what the prophet declared in this fifty-eighth chapter, I think some of that worshipping community
—partly in response to the messiness all around them
—longed to be able to just set aside their cultural ethos of devastation and stress in order to come into their space of worship and only sense God’s presence and peace.

Those beleaguered (troubled) people probably wanted what many of us want: to find sanctuary and to have a chance to forget about all the pain and division outside the temple’s walls.

But to their chagrin, what happened?

The prophet preached a political sermon:

“Is not this the fast that I choose,” Isaiah proclaimed on God’s behalf,
“to lose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?”

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”
The prophet proclaimed to his own beleaguered people that unless their worship was tied to their politics,
to the way they used their power and on behalf of whom,
to moral transformation in every area of their life,
not just in the area of their religious life, then

*their worship was inadequate
and God might not even pay attention.*

Honestly I have recently had several weeks when I just wanted to bury my head in the sand and not say a word on a Sunday morning about anything outside the sanctuary.

But I can't.

I can't just leave it alone.

One reason I can't is because of **your mission statement**—a statement that encapsulates who YOU feel God has called us to be as a **church**.

How do I know?

I went to w.w.w. olivetcc.org.

You have a mission statement:

OUR BELIEFS & COMMITMENTS

Proclaim Jesus Christ and His Gospel

Build a Christian fellowship in the community through worship

supporting Christian Education of not just youth but all members and friends

Service to those in need both locally and globally

Work with other communities of faith to promote peace and justice

FELLOWSHIP

Time for us to be together and supported by one another is just as important as our worship service and time spent on missions. We feel being there for one another is part of our ministry. Sometimes our coffee hour lasts longer than the service and we love potlucks!

THANK YOU, REV. CAROLYN

Olivet was so blessed to have

Rev. Carolyn Young to become part of our family. When her official time with us came to an end, she was gifted with a blanket containing photos of our time together.

She truly helped our "beacon of light" continue to shine.

I was deeply touched.

I surmise that you ARE

Comforted and challenged by the gospel of Christ, you strive to be a welcoming, serving community.

You also have a Vision Statement

To maintain and expand an active presence in the community.

It tells me that you are at the intersection of faith and life,

You share God's grace through worship, preaching, education, and ministries of healing, reconciliation, and justice."

It is that central phrase "at the intersection of faith and life" that informs so much of how I, how we as clergy, try to honor our role as a guest preacher-

For it is a strong component of this church's lifeblood to **proactively** pursue the way our faith, what you believe, intersects with the entire rest of your lives—both as a community and as individuals.

Furthermore, all preachers who enter into this pulpit space, space you entrust to us and whose trust you take seriously, have always been encouraged to walk up these stairs with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.

Paying attention to that intersection of faith and life has defined who this church has been for generations.

Thus, your identity as Olivet Church—a congregation in which you expect both **comfort** and **challenge** from the gospel,

a spiritual community in which we intentionally try to live at the intersection of faith and life, or faith and action—

is one reason why I often cannot leave the **messiness** of our larger political, national life alone as I preach with you

Look, I know that we are all living in very unsettled times.

I know that we come into this space
sometimes on edge,
sometimes exhausted,
sometimes confused,
sometimes just ready to leave all of that out there
and to finally find some **breathing space** for our soul.
I resonate with all of that.

But a **life of discipleship**, following God in the way of Jesus, will always be marked by both comfort and challenge, depending on the season.

A life of discipleship, following God in the way of Jesus, always will be a mixture of inhaling God's grace for ourselves and exhaling that grace out into our world.

A life of discipleship, following God in the way of Jesus, will demand that all of us, not just we preachers, daily take our scripture in one hand and the newspaper in the other and do our best to discern how God is calling us to respond in the messy political realm of our lives.

Our challenge will be to get our lens right.

As a people who worship God, who claim Christian first, the gospel is the primary lens through which we view our world, our politics, and ourselves.

We must resist doing it the other way around.

So as we keep coming together, living at the intersection of faith and life, knowing we will be both comforted and challenged by the good, hard, and often political news of the gospel,

May we do so with patience and love and compassion for one another, trusting that above all we all belong to God, as does this messy and broken yet always being transformed world.

**So, may we learn to be mindful of our urges to fight, flee, freeze, or faint, rather than blindly allowing them to drive.
(To be in the driver seat)**

Learn to lead with curiosity and understanding rather than Judgment.

Practice becoming the kind of people for whom peace is a natural byproduct.

And then when it comes time to do something, whatever that is for you, whatever you can contribute to this world that bring you to life, then you'll be ready.

Then you will be called repairers of the breach -a people who can heal the wounds of this world.

Using the lyrics of Josh Baldwin song, Stand In Your Love. It is on YouTube.

**MY FEAR HAS NO CHANCE
WHEN I STAND ALONE IN YOUR LOVE.**

May it be so!

May it be so!

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

God, you are the source of comfort

We grieve the loss of over 1 million persons who have died from Covid 19 pandemic.

Bring comfort and support as we respond to find medical prevention and healing.

We mourn the loss of lives from mass shootings around our states, most recently in Buffalo.

May healing come quickly for persons with non-life threatening injuries.

O God, we come to you this day, aware of so many new beginnings as students in our state and nation ready themselves to graduate from colleges and universities to pursue other paths.

Soon high school graduations will follow in June, and we know that many young people have a hard time seeing the path ahead.

We pray that you would keep before them a vision of the good that they may serve in all their pursuits.

We pray for our teachers who care for their students amidst COVID, school shootings, war and the commercialized Teacher Appreciation Week. Our high school in Hamden closed down for lack of personnel due to Covid.

Strengthen them.

Energize their work.

We are so grateful for the teachers in our lives.

Protect our children who are often in harm's way as they walk, bike and bus to school. See them through their school week whether hybrid or physically present, on and off the field and playground, at choir practice or sandbox.

Guide our seniors, graduates – such wonders, milestones, and achievements. We cherish the mature graduates, those getting their GED, grandmothers in cap and gown.

Wrap and thread your love and wisdom about these multitudes around the world.

Help them to find their calling, and when the calling cannot be fulfilled or found right now, remind them that the future is ever before them and that possibilities beckon, even when they cannot see them. And that we as a faith community love and support them on their journey.

We pray for those whose lives unfold in the harshness of poverty, war, and violence, and ask that you comfort them in their afflictions.

Empower those with the means to change the course of events to remember the sufferings of others and to act to bring relief.

We pray for those whose hearts are hardened against the least of these and ask that you soften their resistance to change.

O God, be merciful and instructive to those who do not know how to help themselves as well as to those who do not wish to help themselves and those who have no desire to help others.

We pray for ? and ask that you help her/him/they find a place and a path here that will lead to a full and abundant life.

We pray for our church in all its varied diversity of beliefs in the hope that where rifts now have opened up, a way forward can be found through your grace.

Pour down your blessings upon those who are in great need: all the people who have lost family and friends to Covid as well as to the opioid crisis, the people of Ukraine and all the refugees from that war as well as other places of turmoil, such as Syria, Yemen, The Congo. We pray for any other name we say out loud or pray in the deep silence of our own hearts. We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together:

(using "sins")

Our Father,
who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever, Amen!