

“Stand and Deliver”
Jude 17-25

First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

May 31, 2015
Derek McCollum

One of my favorite movies is the Chevy Chase classic, “Fletch.” And one of my favorite lines happens between Fletch and his newspaper editor. Fletch is describing a hunch he has for a story and the editor asks him about a very important detail. Fletch’s reply is, “Well, there we’re in kind of a grey area.” “How grey?” asked the editor. “Charcoal,” says Fletch.

I have felt recently like my life has settled into that charcoal greyness. Being a downtown church, we often have people who come by asking for money or for some sort of help. Very often their stories are a mix of truth and falsehood. And their lives are often a mix of their own sin and poor choices and the sin that has been done to them. It’s very hard to decide what is the right thing to do.

I have had more than one instance in the last month where I am dealing with someone struggling with addictions. And it’s very difficult to determine what is true and what is false about that person’s life.

I’ve been involved with marriages that are falling apart and each side is placing blame on the other and none of it is very clear. Wise, thoughtful people around them can’t really untangle the mess. Lot’s of grey.

We were recently robbed and we think that it was by someone we know. Because of the evidence, we had to confront this person. But we don’t know for sure. I may be wrong. I may have wrongfully accused someone that is innocent.

How do I move forward in such grey—even charcoal grey—situations? Furthermore, as believers, we are clearly called to follow Jesus. Ephesians 5:8 says “for at one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light... and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”

Guess what? Our culture expects Christians to follow Jesus and to try and discern what is pleasing to him. Even if they don't believe what we believe, they at least want us to live what we believe. I think Stevie Wonder say it well in his song "Jesus Children of America"—

Are you hearing What He's saying?

Are you feeling What you're praying?

Are you hearing, praying, feeling What you say inside?

Tell me holy Holly roller

Are you standing Like a soldier?

Are you standing for everything you talk about?

So how am I supposed to follow Jesus, discern what is pleasing to him, move forward in my decisions when so much of it is lived in the charcoal grey? And getting more honest, how do I do it when I am so often very insecure and I don't know what is pleasing to the Lord in each context? How do I do that as a parent when I don't know what to do with my child? How do I do that as a friend when I am not sure how to handle our relationship? How do I do that in my job when things are not clear?

These beautiful verses in Jude are what we can hold on to. "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

That's how Jude ends his letter. He starts by calling believers to contend for the faith. To guard and protect the Gospel at all costs because there are those among them who are promoting falsehood. Then Jude spends a good bit of time giving warnings about what happens when God's people stray from the truth. And he then calls us to build ourselves up in the gospel, waiting on the mercy of Jesus and showing that mercy to those who are struggling.

But how do we do this? How do we not only follow but lead when we are so terribly insecure ourselves? We do this by knowing who God is. Here are three

things that I think we can keep in mind to help us navigate the grey, follow Jesus, and even lead others in doing so.

1. Remember that God has the power to keep us from stumbling. The Lord is continually watching over us. Even when we are treading through murky waters and moving forward without total clarity, we can have faith that the Lord has promised to keep watch over us. Does that mean we won't sin? Of course not. But it does mean that we can move forward in hope rather than freeze in fear. I watched the movie "American Sniper" a few weeks ago. I was struck by the role of the sniper to cover the troops below him. They could move forward into what were very scary situations—situations that were very unclear and quite messy. But they could move forward because they knew someone was covering them. We must shift our faith from our own knowledge of the situation to our knowledge of Jesus' power and care for us.

2. We need to also remember what God has ultimately done for us—to make us stand before him blameless and with joy. The ESV says "...to *present* you blameless before the presence of his glory..." but the implication is one of *standing*. God has the power to *make us stand* before the presence of His glory. This is truly an amazing proclamation. Whenever the glory of the Lord is revealed in Scripture, people immediately become afraid. That's because God's glory is a display of his holiness and power—and it often consumes. When God's glory descends on Mt. Sinai, he tells the people to stand back because coming in contact with God's glory is not usually beneficial to humans! But because of what Jesus has done for us, we can actually stand before the glory of God and not be consumed. If you are a Christian, you stand before God pure and forgiven, having been given the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the only one worthy of standing before the glory of the father. What Jude says is that because of what Christ has done, we stand with joy rather than with fear!

Where will you spend eternity? And why? The good news of the Gospel is that none of our good works can make us to stand before him, but that through faith in Jesus and his work on our behalf, we can stand in eternity before the Lord of the universe and rejoice.

3. Thirdly, we can affirm what is true about God even in the midst of the grey of our lives. Consider here what Jude says about God. He is glorious. He is majestic. He is powerful. He is authoritative. He is the king of the cosmos and it on this king that we can rely. And because of what Jesus has done, we can affirm a glory that would otherwise make us fearful. We can affirm a majesty that would otherwise condemn us. We can affirm a power that would otherwise bring us to ruin. And we can affirm an authority that would otherwise bring us punishment. And we can do it with joy.

We walk forward into the grey areas of our lives not because we are confident in our own decisions or confident in our actions, but because the Lord is able to keep and guard us both now and forever. Amen.