

Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Pentecost IV

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Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Asked the bemused friends who awoke a sleeping Jesus. Do you not care about us? Asked the frightened Israelites as they faced the screaming Goliath who derided their God while challenging them to a fight. This has been our question as we watched our loved ones getting terribly sick and dying alone from COVID. Do you not care about us? This is our question when we come face-to-face with the storms of lives, storms that leave us at the mercy of our adversaries. Storms that make us vulnerable. Storms that make us believe that there is no other help. Storms that make us feel that no one cares about us or what happens to us. Storms that make us wonder if there's anyone in our boat. The question this Father's Day morning is not so much about whether storms will hit, but who do you have in your boat? Who do you have in your corner?

Like you, I have been hit by storms before. They were those unsettling moments when I called into question my own faith in God and my relationship with God. Those were moments when I asked myself, is it worth it? Has it been worth it? But it is within those terrible moments, that I come to realize my dependency on God and that nothing, absolutely nothing is ever possible without God. That those storms will cease if I am to commit myself to God and to believe in God's providence.

What I have come to learn about the storms of our lives is that no amount of human preparation is ever enough to deal with any particular storm. No amount of battle readiness is enough for us to face the Goliaths that attempt to take hold of our lives with the aim of destroying us. We prepare for hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters. We prepare for a pandemic. We prepare for any and all things that may happen to us. But then when they happen, we come to realize that our preparations weren't sufficient enough. It is like David wearing all these armor and saying, these don't fit. My hope isn't in these armor, my hope is in God.

We come to realize that our armors of war that we have built for ourselves are insufficient to face the Goliaths of our lives, the storms of our lives. The only armor we need, the one armor that has proven viable and life-giving is our strong belief in the mighty power of the Jesus who stills the storms in our lives.

Jesus was in a boat with his friends. A storm hit and beat against the boat. Like any fisherman, his friends got worried. How are we going to ride this storm? In the midst of all the chaos, Jesus was asleep. And so they woke him up with these words “Do you not care if we perish?”

What we learn from the gospel story is that, the fact that Jesus was in the boat was no guarantee against any storm. The storms will come. And they may be even bigger than Goliath. St. Paul acknowledges the storms that comes with being people of faith. He doesn’t suggest that being a Christian absolves us or insulates us from the challenges of persecutions, hardships, calamities, beatings or imprisonments. The most important point is that you do not have to give yourself over to be swept away by the ferocity of any storm nor should you recoil into your shell thinking that God’s redemption is too limited in reach and scope. There’s never a promise that we will be kept out of trouble, rather, the promise is that He will go through the trouble with us and then still the storm with His peace.

We become vulnerable when we lose trust in the God of our salvation. We become less safe when we lose focus in the God who saves us from the storms of our lives. Our task is to focus on God’s mercy, focus on God’s compassion-focus on the man who is asleep in our vessel. We have to believe that there are no restrictions in God’s affection for us, and to focus on the fact that there is no storm too strong or big enough for God. There is no Goliath whom the God of David cannot defeat.

There is a story of a lady who complained to her pastor that whenever she comes to church she hears crying and screaming children, she sees people on their cell phones texting, reading messages, checking their Facebook and not paying attention when the pastor is preaching. All these things bother me and makes me wonder what is going on in the church. The pastor thanked the lady and asked if she could do him a favor. The lady replied, anything for you pastor, anything. The pastor then told the lady to go to the kitchen by the office, take a cup and fill it to the brim with water and then walk twice around the church. Why? She asked. Just do me this favor. Said the pastor. And whiles at it, makes sure that there is no spill.

The lady did as the pastor suggested, and when she returned to the pastor's office with the cup of water, the pastor asked her, did you spill any water? No. The cup is still full. She answered. How come you did not spill any water? Asked the pastor. "Well, because I was focused on the cup of water. I didn't want any to spill" That's the point, exclaimed the pastor. That's the point.

When you focus on your own spirituality and faith, you have less time to be distracted by what someone else is doing, when you focus on your own relationship with God, you have less time to worry about being abandoned by God, when you focus on the water that is in your cup, it does not spill. You worry because you are focused on the storm and not the God with whom you have a relationship, the God who calms the storms beating against your boat.

What storm is beating you up? Which Goliath do you see? What fear has captured you? These storms may beat us up, destroy our resolve and lead us to question our faith, and to ask if God cares about us. Remember, David did not wear the armor of steel because that meant placing his hope not in God but in something other than the God who saved him from the lion and the bear. Sometimes we only need just that little faith in God, that faith which is as small as the stones David picked from the wadi, but which are potent enough to power us through the storms of our lives. And so as awful, desperately terrifying and lonely as our circumstances may be, God isn't far off nor does God abandon us to face our storms by ourselves.

The question isn't about whether we trust in God's providence, but whether we will question God's compassion. The tragedy is that we only call on God for help when we are in critical need than when all is well. It is true, and the gospel story bears it out, that the more desperate our condition or circumstances may be, the more we are inclined to seek God's face.

I believe in miracles and miracles do happen. The question that comes to mind is not whether God will show up and still the storm, but whether you have faith enough to call upon Him, even when you know He may be sleeping.

Growing up, my grandmother loved to sing John Newton's poem '*Begone Unbelief*'.

Begone unbelief,
My Savior is near,
And for my relief
Will surely appear:
By prayer let me wrestle,
And he will perform,
With Christ in the vessel,
I smile at the storm.

Can you smile at the storm? Is Christ in the vessel with you? Today, we baptize Shawn, and we do so with the promise that he would grow to recognize not only the storms in life, but to know to keep Christ in his vessel so he can smile at the storm.

I never had the chance to ask my grandmother why she always sung that song or why her face lighted up when she got to the line “With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.” But I can say the song anchored her in a faith that assured her of God’s providential care no matter the circumstance. For one thing, she knew who was in her boat. Who is in your boat?

That hymn always remind me of who it is that should be in my boat-whether the storms are raging or not. Who is in your boat? Who is sleeping in your boat? Do you not care if we perish? Yes, I do care if you perish. That is why I am in your boat. That is why you should always keep me in your boat. Amen.