

Sermon - Ephesians 5:1-2,15-20 Mark 4:35-41 June 21, 2009

Storm Tossed – Still – Fragrant Offerings and Sacrifices to God

Good Gifts As God Provides – Nothing Less – Nothing More

What's it take to be a Christian, to be a good Christian? Faith. Nothing more, nothing less. Yes, to be sure, faith, if it is any good at all, real at all, leads to other things - to obedience, to living a certain kind of life that makes you different, God driven, not greed driven.

But being a Christian begins simply with faith – faith in God and God's promises to you and for you. Jesus knew that. Jesus believed that. His disciples, however, were slow to learn. A little rough water on a boat ride across the sea of Galilee made that pretty clear. The disciples' faith was tested... And in these times we could say, and be right, so is ours.

We're in the perfect storm of economic and political and moral trouble right now. And our own faith is being tested. But we would be wise to remember, even as the disciples learned, it helps a lot not to be alone in the boat. And we aren't. We can live by faith and find safety in the roughest water in life we ever expected to face.

Please pray with me. Lord of life, of calm and storm, of peace and war, of health and sickness, remind us by your word of your great love and care for us that we might ever live with hope. Give me words to speak and your faithful people to hear of your good news for us in Christ. Amen.

Just as he was. Those four words struck me this as they never have in all the years I've read that passage of Jesus calming the storm. They took him with them in the boat just as he was. Jesus wanted to get to the other side of the lake to teach his disciples more and to reach people he had not seen. And when he said he wanted to go, the disciples, I suspect, fishermen that most were, they readied the boat to go. Maybe putting on clothes fit for sailing.

But Jesus - they took him just as he was. And the truth was, Jesus, the rabbi, was better ready for the storm than were his disciples. His faith was fully formed, his willingness to put his trust in God, complete. He was, Jesus was, ready for the storm. And some of us wish we were a bit better prepared for this stormy time in our lives.

Friday night some of the deluge that soaked our area also found its way into the basement of Heritage Hall. And with a bailing scoop and a shop vac I tried to bail out the basement. And it seemed at times to be a hopeless task. God and God's good rain against David and his bailing scoop. No contest.

Sometimes it seems our little boats are being flooded by the storm all around us. And our faith isn't enough to keep us dry, or even afloat. We've heard the words that God is for us and so nothing can be against us. We've said the words – we can do all things through him who strengthens us.

But in the midst of the storms life brings, the best words can seem very inadequate to the dangers and troubles we face. And the disciples were in a boat they feared would swamp. And Jesus was with them – just as he was. No sailor, just a rabbi. And they forgot what they had seen, the power of his words to heal a leper, and a paralytic and a withered hand. They would need to see more, much more, before they would or could trust this man of so much good to be the Son of God.

And in the midst of our troubles, when we're tossed and torn by some of life's most harrowing experiences, in times like these, when most of the things we trust prove untrustworthy, our leaders, our institutions, and when our strength and wisdom cannot save us - we can wonder, and do - if God is with us at all – or just asleep in our floundering boat of this life.

I suspect that the experience in that boat in that storm tossed sea of Galilee was part of the learning experience for Jesus' disciples, another step in learning who he really was, and what he was calling them to do. To put their whole trust in him, and – when it all played out – even in the shadow of the cross – to be witnesses to his resurrection, and to what, through faith in him, they could in fact do. I suspect that day in the boat on a stormy sea is a day that the disciples never forgot.

And that that memory served them well in other times of trouble. And I suspect, as part of God's word to us, it is God's hope that the same story, and all the other Bible stories we have heard, all the faith experiences of our lives will serve us well as we face the dangers toils and snares we run into in our lives.

I marvel at the faith of children, and their wisdom. I know the cutout colored paper that has lined the Lake View space railing and the wall outside the office, might have by now seemed just a kind of sloppy decoration.

You're a piece of the puzzle is the theme. It is their way of telling us that in God's plan there is a place for everyone of us in Christ's Church. So - before you go this morning please read some of the things your children and grandchildren have written about their Church and their faith, and their God.

I know they are just children who have been protected from most of life's trials and troubles by your love and your care. But if you've taught them well, by the words and deeds of your

lives, and if we've helped you here – then they know some of what they will need to know as they grow.

They have begun to know what you and I know better still – That God is Good. That even in a world still torn by the battle of evil and good, a world not yet fully healed of sin, a world of disease and famines, of pride and prejudice and lust for power, of ethnic cleansings and deadly weapons of mass destruction –

Even in a world seemingly swamped by such evils, such darkness, nothing is more powerful than a single match in shattering the darkness, and that the power of love is, yes, greater than the power of hate.

For example – we know that whatever happens in Iran - no matter what oppression may now occur there, because of the cry for freedom by so many in opposition to a regime of hatred, the light of freedom, of hope, of the dignity of every person, male and female, will never be crushed out. We've seen this truth play out in Russia, and, most vividly in China and the result of Tiananmen Square.

We have seen the power of resurrection, so clearly seen in Jesus Christ, and his disciples, and his living body, the Church, now 1/3 of the human race.. The strength of his truth, the power of his words, the message of his life has lit a fire of hope that will not be extinguished.

Sometimes, sometimes, we doubt if the day will ever come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and every person will accept every other person as a member of the human family.

Sometimes – when the storms – of recession, or personal struggle or disease or death - lash our boats, and terrify our lives - we doubt...

In these troubled times - we here have wondered about our wisdom in building as we've built. Were we wise? But then I've seen it in the eyes of people who've begun to come to this renewed place, visitors who've begun to use this special space. I've heard their words of, yes, wonder, at how we've made a statement of faith....

How we've embraced the beauty of God's creation, voted for light and new life and hope as we've built to share the confidence of our faith in God here, and where our mission dollars have gone.

This music ministry appreciation Sunday, it is good for us to be reminded that God's call to us is to share the good news of God's love, to proclaim victory of love over hate, and life over death, to be witnesses in our own lives of the truth that nothing in life or death, no power in the world, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We are to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord in our hearts, giving thanks to God the Father, at all times, and for everything, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And that's what you do every time you come here. You make a statement in a troubled and troubling world, you make a statement to those who worship self-righteousness rather than selflessness, who push pride and prejudice rather than partnership and peace.

You and I cast our votes – and yes, give our offerings - to promote not the way of human envy, but of heavenly love.

Because, because, we do know, deep down, we do know, the victory has already been won, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God with us, our Lord and Savior. Storm tossed! ? Yes. Still - Fragrant offerings and Sacrifices to God – who loves us with a love that never ends.

Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

Children's Moment....

Pennies - from - Heaven..... From God... In God We Trust ...

You gave what you have to God - but God keeps on giving to you;...

So you can keep giving to God so God can keep giving to you....

And that's the way God wants us to live.... Getting, and giving, and getting and

Giving -

That's how God loves us too.....