

Sermon – “In the Midst of Turmoil”

Text – Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 115:1-11

The Gospels and Paul’s letters all proclaim that Christ is promised to always be with us even to the end of the age, (Matthew 28:16-20) and that nothing on earth or in heaven can separate us from God’s love in Jesus, (Romans 8:37-39). Jesus even proclaims that the one who believes in him will do even greater things than he did, (John 14:12).

Yet there are times in my life and perhaps that of some of you when the demands of life seem to batter you from every direction and threaten to overwhelm you. Times that can tempt one to escape from the stress by: medicating with alcohol or other drugs, losing oneself in countless hours of television, burying oneself in work, or any other activity that becomes all-consuming. The problem with these methods of dealing with stress is that the underlying source of stress remains and that these methods of coping can interfere with our ability to deal with the day to day business of life. They can crowd out our ability to be there for our family and friends; interfere with our ability to be effective at work; and affect our health as they interfere with our ability to properly care for our body.

We become like the disciples battered by the storm on the Sea of Galilee unable to perceive the presence of Jesus seeking to comfort and strengthen us in our time of need. Like Peter we may reach out to Jesus but lose faith because of the overwhelming issues that confront us. But what was true for Peter is also true for you and me; Jesus is there reaching out to us in the midst of our doubts. What remains for us to experience Jesus strength and guidance is to have that mustard seed faith that can say Lord I trust in you, remove my doubt that I may more fully experience your presence.

For as Paul says in his letter to the church in Rome that when we dare to believe in Jesus to allow him to be in charge of our life, the very presence of Christ is not some vague abstraction that dwells in Heaven but a very real presence that is present here and now. We are not talking about some abstract belief but a willingness to allow Jesus to be in charge. It means allowing the ways of Jesus to be the final arbitrator of our decisions. This is not an easy task for in the words of C S Lewis we are sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Our natural tendency is to want like Adam and Eve to eat of “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” to be in charge and define for ourselves what is good and evil.

When we are willing to accept Jesus as our Lord will find that he is available to each of us without exception. The distinctions that we make between one another do not exist for Jesus. There is no us and them. There is no alien in Christ’s eyes. There is no Upper, Middle or Lower Class in Christ. Even the distinctions between male and female are of no importance to Christ (Romans 10:10-13; Galatians 3:28). We are all of equal value as a child of God to whom Christ reaches out.

In the midst of turmoil Christ reaches out to us. I invite you to dare to believe that Jesus is indeed the answer. There is forgiveness and freedom from guilt over wrong doing. There is strength to survive what seem like overwhelming stress. There is direction for dealing with impossible problems. There is comfort in the midst of overwhelming grief.

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For some the hand of Christ will touch them in a surprisingly immediate response to their prayers, for others the answer will be in some distant time. For some the answer will be a true miracle, for others the answer will be through the ordinary actions of others, for many the answer combines elements of the miraculous and ordinary. I know that when I had to deal with depression my answer was the combination of faith, anti-depressants, and therapy.

Heaven forbid we be like the man of faith stranded on an island. He prayed with great faith that God would rescue him. One day a ship passed and hailed him asking: “Do you need help?” The man replied, “No help needed, God will provide.” A month later, a helicopter flew over the island and the crew hailed him asking: “Do you need help?” The man replied, “No help needed, God will provide.” The man died and went to heaven and when he met St. Peter at the gate he asked: “Why didn’t God rescue me?” St. Peter replied, “We sent a ship and a helicopter.”

I believe that God comes to us in the miraculous and in the ordinary; that sometimes the answer is a single grand gesture and sometimes a series of seemingly insignificant events; that sometimes the answer comes quickly and sometimes the answer may not be fully realized for days or even generations. I also believe that the answer may be what we desire or something that is difficult to accept.

All of this doesn’t mean that if we are a persons of faith who seek to follow Jesus that we will never experience any problems. In fact, in Jesus’ words to the disciples he warns them that those who follow him will face rejection and persecution (Matthew 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19). These words of Jesus would prove all to true for the Apostles and other followers of Jesus. Even today there are Christians who are being persecuted and even killed simply because they bear the title of Christian. Likewise, it has been the testimony of countless Christians including those we call Saints that they have experienced a time when it seemed as if God had deserted them, a “dark night of the soul”. But it also the testimony of countless Christians including the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, that when they continued to seek Christ that there came a moment when they knew the very presence of God had touched their heart. John Wesley would declare that a prayer meeting at Aldersgate, to which he reluctantly went, that he felt his heart strangely warmed and knew that Christ had died for him and all of his sins were forgiven. The story of God’s amazing grace was no longer an abstract story but a very real personal experience that began a journey that would lead to the establishment of a movement within the Anglican Church that would be responsible for countless individuals throughout the world experiencing the power of God’s amazing, overwhelming love. There would be periods of doubt for Wesley after Aldersgate but Christ would continue to reach out to and use John Wesley and those called Methodists to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Methodism was and continues to be a channel through which Christ meets the spiritual and physical needs of countless individuals. This means we preach, teach, heal, feed, clothe, and advocate.

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The gift of God’s amazing grace is available to each of us. There are some though for whom the gift Christ offers is Good News that they have never heard. There are others who have heard the Good News but have turned their back on it because the turmoil of life has caused them to doubt what they once believed. There are still others who have found it difficult to believe the truth of the Gospel because of the actions of individuals who claim to be followers of the ways of Jesus.

They need to hear the Gospel message in the words and actions of people of faith. They need a word of invitation to attend Sunday worship, prayer group, or a Bible study. They need to hear why you believe. We need to be inviting individuals to be followers of Jesus not because they will fill our pews but because we believe Jesus offers the gift of being truly alive and the ability to fully realize our destiny as an individual created in the very image of a loving God. A love which is stronger than anything in Heaven or on earth. A love that is stronger than hate, whose generosity is more powerful than the lure of get rich schemes, that can create an inclusiveness that defies efforts to divide people into classes, and breaks the power of death in all its forms. We need to invite them to be part of the United Methodist Church because we believe it provides resources and opportunities to grow in their faith. We need to invite them to be part of North Main because we believe we can be companions in their walk with Jesus, sharing the gifts God has given us and being blessed by the gifts God has given them.