



Proclaim the Good News

Second Sunday of Advent (Peace)

Mark 1:1-8

“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

December 10, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures - Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 • 2 Peter 3:8-14 • Mark 1:1-8

It often occurs to me when I observe the chaos in our world today compared to what is often described for us in biblical time that the situation does not seem so different.

Remember in early September when the chaos in North America was so severe: Hurricane Harvey has just devastated most of south Texas. Thousands of people were without food water and shelter. Cattle are drowning in the pastures. It will be years before the people of Texas can expect any semblance of normalcy in their state.

To make life even worse in the United States, an even more ferocious Hurricane Irma was bearing down on Florida and other southern states. Although we in the Midwest have been spared such environmental disasters, I feel sure that our fellow citizens must have wondered what they had done to deserve such earthly punishment.

Nonetheless, there is also great hope in such situations. People go to great lengths to help one another: neighbors pull boats out of their garages and set out in search of those who are stranded. News reports list hundreds of instances of neighbors helping one another. Pastors open the doors of their churches and inviting people to safety never concerning themselves with what their religious denomination may happen to be.

I am citing these examples because there is a certain spiritual, almost divine quality about them. People of whatever religious calling are not simply satisfied by praying for God's help during their prayer services. They actually let neighborly action take over the power of prayer. God's divine power is often discovered in human ways.

I wanted to cite these examples on this Second Sunday of Advent because in the three captioned readings above we find instances where the writers cite God's benevolence and human cooperation working together.

The 8th century prophet Isaiah comforts his people in exile assuring them that "every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low. The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The Israelites did indeed return to their homeland, even as Isaiah had predicted. The passage is simply a word of hope in desperate times. God cares for his people if the people care for one another.

A second message of hope comes from the Letter of Peter to the early Christians who at that time were losing hope that Christ would ever return again. The author assures them that in the Lord's eyes, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are as a day. Rather, God shows you generous patience, since He wants none of you to perish but all to

come to repentance. So, beloved brothers and sisters, while waiting for the Lords coming, make every effort to be found without stain or defilement.

Finally in the gospel of Mark we find the story of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. Mark begins his gospel with a quotation once again from Isaiah the prophet: "I send my messenger before you to prepare your way: a herald's voice in the desert, crying, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path.'" For those who have awaited a prophet like Isaiah, John the Baptist will be that sign of hope.

So, we have here three selections from Jewish and Christian scripture each of which assures the people of that age and our age as well that God does not abandon his people; it just takes a bit of patience to understand God's strange workings in history.

We cannot conclude these thoughts without insisting that God's work in the world is best discovered when each of us lends God a hand to bring hope to our neighbor. I am sure that the folks in Texas and Florida have learned how clearly God works in the midst of catastrophes that continue to fall upon us, one and all.

Proclaiming the Good News

One of the greatest privileges God has entrusted to us is that we have been chosen to carry on the work that Jesus Christ came to this earth to accomplish. Just before He ascended, He told His disciples, "You shall be my witnesses". We are here today as Christians because someone in the chain was faithful to tell us of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although bearing witness for Christ is one of our greatest privileges, it is not an area where most Christians feel strong. I have often thought that God could have chosen a more efficient method of spreading the gospel than entrusting it to the likes of me! He could have picked the angels to proclaim the good news, and it would have gotten done much more quickly. Jesus Himself could have returned to earth to visit a different people group every month and single-handedly He would have done a much better job than the church has done. But the fact is, He chose us to proclaim the good news. The very fact that His church is still going in spite of us is a testimony to His grace and power.

When I was a boy, I used to watch "The Lone Ranger" on TV. At the end of each episode, after the Lone Ranger had saved the victims from some villain, he would mount his horse, Silver. The rescued victim would ask Tonto, who always managed to be standing nearby, "Who is that masked man?" Tonto would reply, "Don't you know? That's the Lone Ranger." Silver would stand on his hind legs, the Lone Ranger would wave and cry, "Hi ho, Silver, away!" To the tune of the "William Tell Overture," he would ride off into the sunset and get ready for the next episode when he would rescue someone else in need.

Through our witness, people should be able to answer the question, "Who is this Man Jesus?" They should know, "He is the Lord God in human flesh, who offered Himself in the place of sinners. Whoever trusts in Him is reconciled to God and receives eternal life as His free gift." God has entrusted to us the great task of carrying on the work of Jesus. As Peter instructs us, "Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Jesus is the Savior and Lord, coming to judge the world and reign as King! Let's boldly proclaim it.

The Good News Is For Sharing

It was August 22, 1953, and the young man had big plans for the evening with the girl he was dating. He picked her up and drove her to an elegant restaurant where they enjoyed a tasteful dinner. After dinner they drove to the nearby Community Park and parked overlooking the river with the moon in full view. That's when he popped the question, and when he got the right answer, he pulled out a diamond ring and slipped it on her finger to seal their commitment.

They were sitting there basking in the ecstasy of their future life together when a police officer knocked on the window of the car. "You'll have to move on," he demanded rather gruffly. "Don't you know that the park is closed?" But that didn't deter his girl. She rolled down the window, stuck her hand in the officer's face and squealed, "Look, officer, we're going to get married." There he was, about to get arrested and thrown in jail for trespassing, and she's announcing their engagement. Why? Because it was good news, and good news is for sharing. You just can't keep quiet about it. You can't keep it to yourself.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? What did you do when you got an "A" on that tough exam? Or graduated at the top of your class? What did you do when your first child was born? Or when you got that big promotion? Or when the loan was approved for your first house? You told somebody. You couldn't help it. It was good news, and good news is for sharing.

That's the point Paul made at the outset of one of the most powerful letters ever written, his letter to the Romans. There are many Bible scholars who believe Romans to be the greatest book in the New Testament. It is without a doubt the foundational dissertation of the Christian faith—a cathedral of Christian doctrine. And the theme of the book is the gospel, which means "good news"—it's the good news about Jesus. And the gospel is not just something to be investigated, examined, analyzed, and dissected. It is something to be shared.

Our Prayer of Good News

*Move us, Joyful God,
take our hands and lead us in your path of creation.*

*When we are uncertain,
guard our hearts with your peace.*

*When our steps falter,
surround us with the strength of your Spirit.*

*Guide us, Dear God our Father,
until we are moving and singing
with the joy of your salvation.*

In the name of Emmanuel, God with Us, we pray, Amen.