

Don't Panic – Go Back To The Beginning

A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson

You've heard the old adage, "Those who don't learn from the past, are destined to repeat it." We sure see the proof of that idiom today. People are promoting ideologies and heresies that have been hashed and rehashed in cultures and churches for centuries. Gnosticism, socialism, communism, globalism, existentialism; and many other "isms" have all come and gone. Sadly, few people have stopping long enough to check their history to see the glaring consequences of each.

Likewise, this lack of historical context has impacted the church. Oh, I'm not talking about the obvious issues of false doctrine and liberalism; those theological varnishes will come and go until Jesus returns. No, I'm talking about the ongoing struggles of compromise, greed, and pride that have challenged the church, and all godly people for millennia. I'm referring to the believer's tendency to look at their problems with material eyes, and forget the overwhelming historical proofs for the goodness, mercy, and provision of God.

Our New Testament lesson is a brief case in point.

Matt 8:23-27 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. 25 And they came to {Him} and woke Him, saying, "Save {us,} Lord; we are perishing!" 26 He *said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. 27 The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Now the setting of this passage is clear; 12 disciples sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. Suddenly, a storm blows up, and the lake becomes nasty and treacherous; the waves slamming the boat and filling the vessel with water. Death seemed to be a reasonable conclusion at this point.

But what we don't see, if we just jump into this passage, is its context. Without context, we don't realize that this dire situation happens just after Jesus' 3 chapter sermon (*the Sermon on the Mount*) on a host of topics (*including trust and worry*). This experience also falls right in the middle of a list of Jesus' miracles. If we limited the context to even the last couple days, you might conclude that Jesus' disciples were suffering from early onset dementia. How could you be so quick to panic, when you've witnessed the kind of power displayed by your leader - who's right there in the boat?

Jesus addresses the real problem in His brief question, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" You see, the problem was not one of context, or even proof. The real problem facing the disciples was their glowing lack of faith; the belief that the obvious conclusion was in fact, the right conclusion...the only conclusion. We see this in

their observation after Jesus calmed the sea, "What kind of a man is this...?" The problematic and "inconvenient" truth was that all the evidence pointed to Jesus as more than a man...but the disciples couldn't handle that. As Carl Sagan said at the beginning of the first pro-evolution Cosmos series, "We will follow the evidence wherever it leads," except if it points to God, then all bets are off.

Jesus was more than a man, He *was* God; and therefore, able to do more than they could even ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

The challenge imbedded in this "storm" passage, and the gentle correction of Jesus, was to go beyond a simple evaluation of immediate needs. The anchor of our faith must go deeper than our temporary inconvenience, or even this transitory life. We have to see God's character and power in the context of "all generations forever and ever." When we come out the other side of these storms and trials, we need to learn, as Christian counselor June Hunt points out, which are:

- a) The storms you rebuke.
- b) The storms you rise above.
- c) The storms you endure.
- d) And the storms you don't dare rebuke.

I once heard a radio broadcast discussing our need to trust God; having faith in more than His ability to redeem my immediate problems. The pastor talked about how each child learns to trust their parent based on hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands of life experiences.

- * After the scary experience of birth, did Mommy hold me close?
- * When I was chilly, did Mommy wrap me in a warm blanket?
- * When my tummy hurt, did Mommy hold me close and nurse me?
- * When I was scared, did Daddy pick me up and reassure me?
- * When my bottom was messy, did my parents change me?

Then as we grow, we hear stories of other faithful parents and grandparents. We learn that men and women in familiar uniforms (*police, firefighters, EMT's, etc*) are there to "protect and serve." We come to understand that most teachers are honorable and caring people, who give of themselves daily to serve their students. We are told that pastors (*again, most of them*) truly care about you, heart and soul, and can be trusted for counsel and spiritual instruction. **We learn to trust**, as our daily reality is supported by our connection with historical truth.

So if this is true, then why do we so often fail to incorporate those historical facts into our foundations? (or *core memories*, as the movie, *Inside Out*, calls them) This is exactly what the church has been challenged to do since the earliest days of God's people, Israel. We see this in our Old Testament lesson for today:

Is 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! 2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And

through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. 3 "For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place.

This is the battle ground on which we stand *today*, not someday - **TODAY**.

Rom 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Isaiah 43 was written to the people of Israel centuries ago. But its truth applies to all those who call on the name of Christ for salvation today. As our Savior, our Redeemer, Jesus has a claim to our lives; we are his possession, the sheep of His pasture. Therefore, all we are - all we have - all we do - is connected to and flows from our relationship with Him. There is no part of our lives, no decision we make that can be considered apart from the principles and character of God.

Sure, life might be easier if we would just keep the closet door closed, and our "personal faith" kept out of sight and out of the public square. But God hasn't transformed our lives and given us "*the riches of His glory*" only to be silenced now. He has promised to be "with us," in and through every storm we may face in this life. And He guarantees that our souls will endure through each trial. (*Think Hananiah, to Mishael, and Azariah*)

Dan 3:17 "If it be {so,} our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 "But {even} if {He does} not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

God is moving! He isn't still; neither is He silent.

In the now classic movie, *A Princess Bride*, three less than honorable characters set out to start a war. All three are quickly overcome by a masked avenger, who you later find to be the hero. And you soon find one of them, Inigo Montoya, struggling with this new feeling of purposelessness. They show him drunk, sitting on the front steps of the house where the original vision was once conceived. When asked what he was doing, he responded, "*I was told to go back to the beginning, so here I am. Back at the beginning.*"

Isaiah has been trying to get God's people to abandon their immoral and godless ways, turning instead to the Lord, before the horrible enemies of Assyrian and eventually Babylon arrive. He has warned, cajoled, begged, and promised. But his words have fallen on deaf ears.

However, some have heard and tried to align themselves with the message of Isaiah. To them he delivers many such messages of hope and comfort. And in this case he challenges them to do what we so often forget to do, "go back to the beginning."

Why did God's people so quickly abandon their God and seek instead human alliances and earthly idols? They

forgot their God. Why did the disciples so quickly panic when Jesus was already in their boat? Their faith didn't have eyes to see the clear facts of God's faithfulness before them. And why does our faith so quickly buckle in the face of "urgent" and material discomfort? Could it be that we haven't spent enough time recalling the goodness and faithfulness of God? When was the last time you "went back to the beginning?" How much time have you spent, "*Looking to the God who formed you – who redeemed you – who called you by name – who owns you?*"

He has never failed us yet, and He is not about to sleep through this storm!