

Devotions - August 10 - 16, 2008
By, Pastor Steve Gauger
Calvary, Rapid River
Fortune Lake Camp Board Member

Sunday, August 10

Matthew 14: 33

“Those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The disciples are convinced by Jesus’ amazing display of power over the wind, the sea, the storm. Only the Son of God could demonstrate such amazing control over nature. This miracle on the Sea of Galilee makes it perfectly clear to them that Jesus is “Lord of Creation.” But is it like that for us? Do we look for a demonstration of power, or a single miracle of Jesus that answers all of our questions? Some indeed, like Peter, may have had a personal miracle that changed their relationship with Jesus forever. But for so many Christians, the Gospels are an all-encompassing testimony to Jesus’ power and divinity. There is no single episode that persuades us, but rather the cumulative effect of the gospel witness: this Jesus demonstrates to us by his compassionate healing, his feeding the hungry, his powerful preaching, his remarkable parables, his power over nature, and especially his power over death, that he is indeed “the Son of God.”

How blessed we are to have this wonderful witness to the life and work of Jesus. How much we should be inspired to study these Gospel witnesses, and to grow in confident faith and trust in Jesus—God’s Son, and our help in every trouble.

Thank you Lord, for the testimony of the Gospels to the life and ministry of your Son, Jesus. Help us to grow in our understanding and our faith— confident that everything we need to know is revealed in your holy Word. Amen.

Monday, August 11

1 Kings 19:11

*“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord,
for the Lord is about to pass by.”*

We know what it means when an important politician or visiting dignitary is about to pass by: the police sirens scream, Secret Service agents run along side a procession of limousines, motorcycle cops keep the crowds behind the barricades. It's a big event, and we expect that there will be lots of commotion and a big show, even if we can't see through the darkened windows of the limousines. Elijah seems to expect that God will demonstrate his presence with a “really big show,” even if he couldn't see God directly.

But in the storm, in the earthquake, in the fire, there is plenty of sound and fury, but God is not present in any of those demonstrations of power that people readily suppose are revelations of the Holy One. Instead, God reveals himself to Elijah in the silence, and in the quiet voice asking simply, “Elijah, what are you doing here?”

God challenges us with the same question: what are you doing here? what are you looking for? The God of all creation, of thunder and earthquake and fire, promises to come to us in the quiet listening of our hearts, to focus our attention on his hidden presence in our world, and to meet us in the lives of his faithful people.

God of the earthquake, help us always to remember your presence in the quiet voice and the humble life. In a world that loves power and splendor, remind us of your presence in the simple lives of those who remain faithful to you. Amen.

Tuesday, August 12

2 Chronicles 33: 13

*“Manasseh prayed to God, and God received his entreaty,
heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom.
Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God.”*

Most of us would probably skip over the book of Chronicles if it were not included in the daily lectionary. One king after another, generation after generation, and the truth is that most of them are real scoundrels. A few, like Josiah and Hezekiah, seem worth studying and learning from, but most are like Manasseh, who performed abominations in the sight of the Lord, and overturned all of the good that his father Hezekiah had accomplished.

But God is bigger than any sin that Manasseh might have committed. When the Assyrians come and take him captive, Manasseh humbles himself, and God delivers him, and answers his prayers, and restores him to the throne in Jerusalem. And just like that, Manasseh is a changed man, and he restores the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem and Judea. The great sinner becomes a model king. Who could have guessed it?

God is faithful and able to overcome our darkest sins. It is the promise of the resurrection: there is new life for everyone who hears God’s voice, calling to us in the darkest days of our lives.

God of grace, you care about each one of us and about the outcome of our lives. Give us the wisdom to hear your voice, especially at those times that seem most hopeless to us. Amen.

Wednesday, August 13

Psalm 89:2

*“I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.”*

Our perspective on the heavens is quite different from the people of the Old Testament: the wonderful images from the Hubble spacecraft have given us a new view of the heavens, filled with cosmic violence and upheaval, stars dying and being born, black holes swallowing everything in their grasp. The universe is a scene of constant change and amazing power, but it is really not something we would claim is faithful and unchanging.

We might better think about the incredible size of the heavens, and confess that God’s love and faithfulness are greater than even that immense expanse of galaxies. Whatever we conceive of in terms of the vastness of space or its incredible explosions, God is bigger, stronger, more powerful. In fact, we know that when the sun burns out and the new galaxies come into being, God’s love will still be there: steadfast, faithful, unchanging, even in a universe of constant change. What more could you or I possibly ask for?

God of the universe, your love for us is bigger than any catastrophe that can happen in the farthest reaches of space. We trust in your faithfulness, because you are the God of all creation, and the Savior who promises to bring each one of us to your eternal home. Amen.

Thursday, August 14

Hebrews 10:31

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

If all we knew about God was that God hates sin and judges sinners, we too might claim these words from Hebrews as our own. Great preachers have brought about great religious revivals by reminding their congregations of how terrible it is to be sinners in the hands of an angry God. And yet we see the weakness of this approach when life-long Christians express their fear that they will not measure up when God judges their lives. The question of salvation evokes a fearful response: “I just don’t know if I’ve been good enough for God.”

But there is a second half to this chapter from Hebrews, and it tells us “Do not abandon that confident hope of yours. It brings a great reward.” ‘That confident hope’ is not that I have been good enough to satisfy the living God, but that when God looks at my life, he sees his Son, Jesus. When that happens, then it is “a blessed thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Thanks be to God for the wonderful grace shared with us through Jesus!

Loving God, we ask you to transform our fear and trembling into confident faith. Help us to remember every day that we live in Jesus, and that he lives in us. Remember us in your kingdom, and measure our lives by the standard of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, August 15

1 Samuel 5:11

“They sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, ‘Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people. For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there.’”

We all know what happens to evil people when they get their hands on the Ark of the Covenant from the “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” The Nazis are no match for the power of God residing in the Ark. So it was for the Philistines, hated enemies of ancient Israel. Wherever the Ark was moved, the people were struck with tumors, and a great panic ensued. The hand of God was heavy on the people of Philistia.

Our image of God is often shaped by the stories we focus on from God’s Word. We may take as our central core these Old Testament stories of the presence of God as a terrible scourge upon the enemies of Israel. Illness and death become instruments of God’s anger. God is a God of wrath and judgment. When our attention turns to the stories of Jesus and his compassion and healing, we envision a very different relationship between God and humanity. God seeks to come close to each and every person; God’s presence is a blessing; God wants all people to be saved and to come to him.

The picture of the destructive power of the Ark of the Lord makes for good Hollywood fare. But the picture of Jesus reaching out to a world in need makes for a much more powerful theological statement. Through Jesus, the heavy hand of God becomes a very good thing for all people.

Almighty God, you reach out to all the world in your Son Jesus. Let us be instruments of your healing presence, so that through us your hand might touch all who need to know your love. Amen.

Saturday, August 16

Psalm 82: 7, 8

*“Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”*

These words from Psalm 82 are the words of God, judging the nations of the world. They are a reminder to all of us that how we treat the poor and the lowly is a direct reflection of our relationship to God. If we claim to be God’s people, then the measure of our faithfulness to God is our care for the orphan and the widow, the oppressed and the downtrodden. These are the words of a Hebrew psalmist, but all of us can see the same theme in Jesus’ parable of the Last Judgment. “When you do it to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do it unto me.”

Except that in Jesus, the God of the universe, looking down on the nations of the world, comes to live in the midst of the orphans, the homeless, the sick and the hungry. He becomes one of the oppressed and destitute, sharing their suffering and sorrow. In Jesus, God’s command to give justice and rescue the needy becomes God’s invitation: do it to the least of these, and you do it to me. Jesus invites us to see his face in the faces of all those who need our love and our assistance.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your invitation to share in your love for all the world. Help us to remember that the hungry, the homeless, the sick, the refugees of this world, all of them are your brothers and sisters. Amen.