

5 Lent: Fearless Week Five: Fear of Calamity

March 21, 2010

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's

I choose today to not have a children's homily, so we can spend that time on the topic in our Lenten sermon series.

We continue exploring various kinds of fear that every human being faces. By what name have you felt the Fear of Calamity? Accidents, afflictions, bereavement, difficulty, disappointment, disaster, failure, hard times, miseries, misfortunes, reverses of fortune, ruin, sufferings, tragedies, trials, tribulations, troubles, or woes?

Jesus said in today's Gospel, "The perfume was meant for the day I am buried. You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me." Jesus knew that calamity was coming at him like a freight train; and it was unavoidable because human beings were afraid of him and resented him, while God the Father needed him to finish the plan that had been put into play. Jesus experienced the calamity of betrayal, torture, and death.

You and I see calamity around the world in the news, we hear it from friends, it moves in closer as it scrapes against people we know, wounds or even kills people we love. We see people killed by war and drug trade; cancer and heart disease, tsunamis and earthquakes. There are people we care about with wounded bodies, or minds, or spirits.

Why does God make these horrible things happen? Or is God the source? Calamity or adversity can come from God; to punish sin or strengthen character.

Calamity can come from Satan; to draw us into sin – but even then it is only if God lets it happen.

Calamity can come from our own doing, or from the sins of other people (Korean concept of HAN).

And Calamity can come from chaos, which often breaks through the order of creation in this imperfect world.

The truth is that it isn't a matter of whether calamity will touch our lives or not; it will. The important question is; How will you react when it comes?

The Fear of Calamity can drag you into powerlessness, dragged so low that you cannot celebrate today, and you see no reason to. Your fear of tomorrow robs you of any happiness today. But Scripture tells us over and over again that despite the fact that bad things will happen in this life, we should celebrate life, and celebrate God's love.

John 16:33, *"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*

Psalm 37:7, *"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."*

Matthew 6:34, *"Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries."*

Rather than being dragged into powerlessness, Fear of Calamity can motivate us to plan carefully; to work for the cause of peace; to pray for safety from harm; to trust a spiritual partner (same sex) to share fears on days when our faith wobbles.

Life experience certainly teaches that God does allow calamity to come near us. It feels like a lightning strike that is so close that it rattles the house. And sometimes calamity even scores a direct hit. It is in the midst of calamity that we tend to pray our most authentic prayers. There is no room for any other kind of prayer. And then we learn things about God in suffering that we cannot learn any other way.

In the midst of calamity we go to God, we depend on God, we place ourselves in God's hands, instead of depending on ourselves; maybe for the first time in our lives.

God loves us; and God intends to use these events for good, regardless of their source.

Romans 8:28-29, *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son. "*

Notice that these verses don't say that God causes everything to work out to have a happy ending on earth. That isn't true. There are certainly unhappy endings on earth. We live in a very imperfect world. And that is why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

But God will not waste a hurt. God will even use the evil we experience to build our character for eternity. Everything God allows to happen is part of God's plan for you to become like His son. Everything that happens in your life has spiritual significance.

We learned a lesson in our course a few years ago on 40 Days of Purpose: If you are facing trouble right now, don't ask "Lord, why me?". Instead ask, "Lord, what do you want me to learn?" We need to declare spiritual warfare against this brand of fear, this Fear of Calamity. Do not allow it to consume you or defeat you. Do not allow it!

So; regardless of the source of the adversities and calamities that try to zap us like a lightning bolt finding its way to the tallest tree, God will use those events to shape our character to become like His son.

One more quote from Paul says it all;

2 Cor 4:17, *"Our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever."*

Amen.