

Sermon for Sunday, June 21, 2009

Third Sunday After Pentecost

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson **1 Samuel 17:(1a,4-11,19-23), 32-49**

Psalm **9:9-20**

Second Lesson **2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

Gospel **Mark 4:35-41**

When was the last time you were really, really scared of something?

Maybe it was an unexpected situation. Maybe it was an unexpected jolt. Maybe it was reading a Stephen King novel or watching a scary movie on television. Maybe it was just watching television in general. Whatever the reason, we all know that the world can be a very scary place, and there are moments when our fear can immobilize us.

Where's God in these moments? These are the times when it seems as if God has abandoned us, doesn't really care about us, or is asleep at the back of the boat or whatever. The burden of scripture that we've heard this morning tells us another story: God never abandons us, no matter how much we feel God's absence in our lives.

It's sort of like that story I'm sure you've all heard, entitled "Footsteps." It seems to us as if we're waking with God on a beach, but when we're most afraid, most in pain, most in grief, most in sorrow, or most confused, there are only one set of footprints in the sand.

Those are the times, so the story goes, that we're being carried by God. ...

We're like the disciples in Mark's gospel lesson this morning, aren't we? Mark portrays them as notoriously slow learners—they seem to keep missing the point, the point of who Jesus is. They have to learn the lesson over and over and over again. Maybe that's why the same story we heard this morning is repeated only two chapters later in Mark's gospel.

We too keep asking: "Teacher, don't you care if we perish?"

We often cling to people and situations in an attempt to find safety and security, don't we? "Why can't things be the same? Why can't he be like our last priest? Why can't she be like our previous bishop? Why can't things go my way? Why can't I get what I want? Why can't the world be safe for me, since I've been such a good and faithful person. ..."

Why, why, why...

Of course, God constantly answers our "why's," but we're too busy asking questions to even hear the answer. We're too busy being afraid. ...

Now, I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't be afraid, that it's wrong to be seized with terror in times of terror. It's precisely during those times that we must hold to our conviction that God is with us, that God is for us. Our ultimate confidence is that God has made us into a new creation, a new people, capable of not only assuaging our own fears, but stepping out into faith with boldness and courage.

The love of Christ compels us to put our fears and terrors into perspective and to hear that same voice that the disciples hear in today's gospel lesson: "Why are you afraid?"

Amen. ...