

## Crying Out

Midweek Advent 2; Series A

Psalm 107:23-32

“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress” (vs.28)

Jack and Sarah’s plans for the Christmas of 2007 were falling right into place as they prepared to share their best present of that Christmas season with their family. Sarah was close to two months pregnant. She and Jack had tried for many months for a pregnancy but for many months with no success. Finally, Sarah had conceived just a couple of months before Christmas! She and Jack were filled with joy and planned to surprise their family with the news on Christmas morning. That was the plan, until something unexpected happened. Sarah had a miscarriage a couple of weeks before Christmas. In the busyness of the Christmas season Jack and Sarah were like any other couple, making their holiday plans and preparations, intent upon seeing them through.

The words uttered by Job permeated the whole experience. After Job experienced the loss of his property and children he cried out, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away . . .” (Job 1:21). So too in the lives of Jack and Sarah the Lord of life had intervened in a shocking, premature, and unexpected way to take away that life. In a time when families are preparing to celebrate God’s intervention to bring the gift of joy to the world in the form of a newborn child, at least one family was experiencing God’s intervention in a way that brought sorrow, sadness, stress, and increasing anxiety.

In our text this evening the psalmist gives us a picture of our Creator-God intervening in his creation. Our portion of Psalm 107 begins with God’s creatures going about their daily business, making their plans and preparations, perhaps consumed with the illusion that they are truly in control of the unfolding of those plans. The psalmist tells us, “Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters” (vs.23). We get the impression that these creatures are sailors and workers of the sea. They go about their business on the waters. They erect and sail vessels to complete trade and commerce. Fishermen set out to catch their quota for the day. Manmade dams are built for more effective travel. In ancient times trenches were carved in the Nile to channel rivers into fields. Human civilization arose and centered on “doing business” on the waters, along the banks of the great Tigris, Euphrates, and Nile Rivers, as well as the Mediterranean Sea. The waters became something to master and control for the purpose of “doing business.”

As the psalmist continues, while the people were doing business on the great waters, the Lord of all creation, the Lord of the Sea, intervened. “For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths” (vv.25-6). The people experience the control, power, and might of the Lord in a way unexpected and this experience broke them. The psalmist tells us that the courage of the once proud people “melted away” (vs.26) and they were “at their wits’ end” (vs.27). They were left at the mercy of this mysterious, almighty, all powerful, God of creation who can intervene in his creation when and where he pleases for his *greater purposes*. And the psalmist tells us the response of people who were on the tidal wave roller coaster ride, hanging on for dear life in the middle of the stormy ocean. “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble” (vs.28). To the one who intervened and put them in this situation, they cry for help.

On Christmas Eve distraught and searching for answers Sarah went to one of her church-going family members with a question. After sharing the situation about losing the child she asked this family member, “Is God punishing me and Jack?” In her distress and trouble and “at her wits’ end” Sarah cried out for help. Her inclination was that for some reason God had intervened and so armed with a question she cried out to one who she was pretty sure knew this God who created and intervenes in his creation, who “gives and takes away.” Through that conversation the church-going family member proclaimed to her our Triune God who intervenes in his creation not ultimately for harm but for his good purposes of salvation in his Son. He proclaimed for her not a cold, distant, and ruthless God but a personal, loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who listens to the cries of his people and hears them. That night the family member invited Sarah and Jack to go to church with him and to begin to get to know this loving, merciful, gracious Triune God who intervenes in his creation for his salvation purposes. They agreed.

In our text this evening the psalmist tells us that people cried to the Lord in their trouble and the Lord “heard their cry and delivered them from their distress. He made the storm still, and the waves of the sea were hushed” (vv.28-9). To be sure, our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who created the heavens and the earth is not a tame God. He is the potter who has a right to do as he chooses with his clay (Rom 9:21). He can intervene in his creation as he sees fit. He is a just God who loves justice and righteousness and punishes wrong. But he is also a merciful God who loves his entire creation. Our God who loves justice and righteousness longs for all people to be right with him as their Creator. And so he becomes our Redeemer. He intervenes in his creation to deliver us from the full consequence of our injustice and unrighteousness.

We have a tendency to be consumed with our plans and purposes. We can be consumed at times with the illusion that we can control our lives and the circumstances of them. When our God intervenes in his creation in sudden and unexpected ways it reminds us that we are a part of his bigger plans and purposes. In an odd way these unexpected and seemingly chaotic interventions point to the truth that our God is in control of this world he created.

Our text reminds us that the God of creation is in control of the wind and the waves. He can stir up storms but also can still the storms. We are now in the Second Sunday of the season of Advent, a new church year. In a way the entire season of Advent is centered on the theme of God intervening in his creation. It culminates in the celebration of God’s intervention in the birth of the person of Jesus Christ—God himself in the flesh! Through this one God has broken the heavens and the earth to still the storms that we so often create in our quests for control as we “go about our business.” The very one who awoke from sleep to still the storm for his disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Mt 8:23-7) intervenes to show you mercy. God heard the cries of his people for help and through his Son he delivers you from your plight. He came into the world in which he is fully in control and he was overcome. He came armed with the mighty deeds of his Heavenly Father and he saw and experienced firsthand the mighty deeds of mankind with piercing hammer blows. He was plunged into worst of storms that the swirling rage of mankind could conjure. And through that sacrifice he purchased safety for you. With his innocent suffering and precious blood he intervened to make things right between you and our holy, all-powerful, almighty God. He rose from the dead to conquer the death that would otherwise separate you from eternal safety with him. The storm created by the guilt of your sin is stilled. He redeems your life from the deep through the mighty waters of your baptism and declares you his holy child.

The psalmist tells us that when the waters were stilled the people were glad. They were no longer content just calling upon the Lord only in times of serious trouble. Our reading this evening ends with the people “thanking the Lord for his steadfast love” (vs.31), “extoling him in the congregation of the people” (vs.32), and “praising him in the assembly of the elders” (vs.32). This is the response of those who experience the salvation of our God. You have experienced his grace, his love, his mercy, his life. And that experience has the power to transform you even as you continually live in the world where our un-tame God intervenes when and where he pleases for his greater purposes of salvation.

Jack and Sarah continued going to church even without that family member attending with them. They learned to cry out to the Lord in their troubles and give them over to him. In time they took their troubles to the Pastor and he cried out to the Lord with them and for them. And in time our un-tame God of all creation who intervenes when and where he pleases for his greater purposes of salvation saw it fit to bless Jack and Sarah with life—three children to be exact. Through a shocking and unexpected intervention God worked to bring about his greater purpose of bringing his salvation to Jack and Sarah and now their three children. And to this day all five are still calling upon the Lord in repentance and prayer. Amen.