

"Peace in the Storm."

Gen. 15:1-12, 17-18; Ps. 27; Luke 13:31-35

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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The Second Sunday in Lent, March 4, 2007

Storms have been raging all across the country this week. Tornadoes have torn up schools and homes. Heavy rains and strong winds have done much damage. Snow and ice storms have left slick roads and have sent cars careening into one another or off into the ditch.

We are well-aware of these storms but of course there are others. We have many among us and around us who are dealing with storms of a different type as they fight life-threatening illness or try to muster the strength and the courage to handle another round of chemotherapy or radiation. Others try to endure the storm of chronic pain.

And there are storms in the form of temptations and some who give in to them in such a way that a flood of addiction leaves individuals and families drowning in their own willfulness and weakness.

Our lives are full of stormy weather. Along the way we are tempted to forget that God is present with us. Sometimes the storm is just too loud, too real, too overwhelming.

We tend to get caught up in our fears, even when we have seen the saving power of God on more than one occasion. In that I guess we are like the people of Israel and their story is our story.

Theirs is a story of wandering through wilderness, crying out to God, receiving consolation and love, but then things get good and they forget the one who has given them peace and security and they wander once again.

The Bible is a chronicle of heartache and pain which we bring upon ourselves and upon God every time we decide we can go it on our own.

We let our fear get the best of us and forget to listen to the psalmist. We see the ranks of the Philistine armies across the valley and we tremble.

We let our eyes and our minds overrule our hearts and our memories.

The Psalmists knew about storms and they knew about shelter and refuge. Here in Psalm 27 we have a call to remember that God is with us and that we need not fear, whatever happens.

Having faith does not mean that we are granted immunity from storms. Faith, as many of us have come to know through our experiences and through witnessing the experiences of others, is what enables us to have a feeling of peace in the midst of the storm.

The Psalmist knew that the Lord was his light and his salvation and there was no need to fear. He knew that even though the events of his life ought to have given rise to fear and trembling, he could travel to that quiet center where the presence of God overwhelmed the fear he felt.

The same is true of Jesus. Whether these Pharisees in this story were being friendly to him and trying to warn him or whether they were enemies who were trying to rattle him hardly matters. What matters is Jesus' response. Nothing will get him off track from his chosen path. Nothing will cause him to lose sight of the goal.

In reply to the Pharisees Jesus calls Herod a "fox" and refuses to allow him to thwart his plan for redemption and grace as he makes his

measured march toward Jerusalem and the final confrontation with evil.

Jesus knew the saving power of God's love even as the storm grew more and more ominous. He knew there was no need to fear whatever might come. He had the peace that passes all understanding and now he is the Peace that Passes all Understanding.

And we need the peace of Christ to counter the noise of our storms. We need that peace and that calm assurance because so often see the match-up between the fox and the hen and have a hard time imagining how the hen could possibly win out over the wiles of the fox.

We would rather place our trust in the things we can see, the things that are tested and certified ... And discount the power and the purpose of God in Christ.

We mistake quick-fixes for eternal soul-solutions.

In the fight over the chicks, we are more willing to bet on the fox than the mother hen. But God is betting the whole farm on the hen!

The apostle Paul speaks of the way God does the unexpected when he writes:

"The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those of us who are being saved it is the power of God...for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

The world bets on power every time. But God bets on love. The world bets on money and influence, but God bets on generosity, and care and self-sacrifice. The world bets on the fox, but God bets on the hen.

Jesus says: "Go tell that fox that I cannot be held back from my saving purpose. I will not be deterred. I will not retreat in fear. I will spread my wings and gather my brood. And I will stand between my chicks and the fox every time!"

Listen to God calling to you and inviting you to come under the protection of God's wings: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Even now, the mother hen would gather us in.

The protection of God does not save us from market forces, or the ravages of cancer. No tent, no wing, no shelter, will protect us from the forces around us which threaten us.

The protection of God only offers us the assurance that we are not alone in the struggle - and, our ultimate safety is never in doubt, because of the one who spreads his arms and gathers us in love, is the one who has gone to the cross for us and is risen with healing in his wings, the Prince of Peace, the source of peace in the storms of life.

In T.S.Eliot's play Murder in the Cathedral, Archbishop Thomas a Beckett is in danger because he has opposed his one-time friend, King Henry.

December 27, 1170 AD, the priests come to warn Beckett: "Run, hide! The king's knights are coming to kill you."

Beckett responds: "Peace! Be quiet! Remember where you are...I am not in danger: only near death."

"Throw open the doors! I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ, the sanctuary, turned into a fortress. The church shall protect her own, in her own way, not as oak and stone."

(Or, one might say, not as foxes do).

The knights enter and find Beckett continuing his work at the altar and that's where they killed him. But he was never in danger, - only near to death.

The Pharisees run in and tell Jesus: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you!"

Jesus knew he was not in danger, only near to death and near also to the completion of his work, for our sakes!

"Go tell that fox for me - he has been outfoxed by the love of God!"

Who are we going to bet on? The some-time power of the fox? Or the never-ending love of the mother hen?

Even now, God is stretching wings of mercy and love over us waiting ... hovering ... hoping that we will return the love that God pours out for us and draw near to God's embrace and know that peace that makes it possible to hang on even when the storm is raging.

May the peace that passes all understanding help us to hang on in faith, hope and love until all the storms of life are past.

Amen.

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