

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I want to quote from the “Love and Rockets” song; however, I am not going to sing it so you can rejoice in that. “You cannot go against nature, because when you go against nature, it’s part of nature, too. Our little lives seem complicated, it’s a simple thing. Simple as a flower, and that is a complicated thing. When you’re down, it’s a long way up, but when you’re up, it’s a long way down.” The Chorus is “No new tales to tell.”

Now for some of us that may remind us of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, but I bring this song to us because it seems to be full of contradictions. As do a couple of our lessons this morning. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians appears to be filled with contradictions and our gospel account puts Jesus into a contrary light. Now Paul, when he was writing to the Corinthians, seemed to be filled with contradictions. We need to remember that Paul himself, at least to the Corinthians, appeared to be one of the biggest contradictions of all. Paul started his ministry hunting down, persecuting, and imprisoning Christians, because he saw them as a threat to his faith. He felt that this new “Cult,” this new following of this wacko Jesus guy, was out to destroy the fundamentals of the Jewish faith.

So he hunted them down. Once he had this experience, this conversion on the road to Emmaus (you can read about it in the book of Acts), and he began proclaiming the gospel of Christ, Christians of Jewish heritage continued to have difficulty accepting him. They had a hard time warming up to this guy who used to hunt them down, put them in prison, and often times ended up having them killed. This was because of those actions, because of what he had done before he became a believer, as well as because this message that he was proclaiming was so contrary to the way that the world lived. This message of grace, love and forgiveness, things that are given to us who believe, which is not the way the world works. The world in which you have to earn God’s love. God isn’t just going to love you. You have to offer those sacrifices, you have to give of yourself, you have to believe to get God’s love.

Paul says No! That offering those sacrifices, that bleeding has already been done for us. But often times Paul encountered folks who just didn’t listen to his messages. He says to us in 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 (this is from the New Living Translation). Verse 4, “In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. 5. We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. 6. We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. 7. We have faithfully preached the truth. God’s power has been working in us. Those are all of the things that Paul endured because of God’s love. He had this lousy physical life. These amazing hardships because God loved him and he was preaching this message to

those who didn't want to hear it. That doesn't seem to make sense, does it? If God loves us, our life is going to be so hard? Shouldn't it be if God loves us everything is going to go well for us?

He goes on to these other verses. Verse 8: We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. 9. We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. 10. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything. Contradictions are almost what he says there, over and over again. They are beaten, thrown in jail, and run out of town all for the sake of the gospel. All for the sake of saying that you don't need to earn God's love because it is given to us freely.

In our gospel lesson this morning we have a slightly different situation. (I suggest you read the first part of Chapter 4 in Mark's Gospel.) Jesus has been spending all this time teaching these folks, trying to get them to understand the parables that he is trying to get across. He has had a long tedious tiresome day. It has been filled with dealing with large group sessions and one-on-one things. He is tired. I guess he is maybe tired and perhaps a little hungry. Now that is reading into the text, I'll admit. They get into the boat, and they head across the lake. Why did the disciples go across the lake? To get together the side!

What happened when they got to the other side is in Chapter 5. They land and it turns out that they are in a cemetery. But in this cemetery lives this guy, this real Wacko of a person. He is demon possessed and running around naked. Jesus and disciples get out of the boat and the guy comes running toward them and – I did it again, didn't I? I am off the topic. Go home and read Chapter 5!

They are in the boat and Jesus is snoozing in the back of the boat. Most of these disciples are fishermen, they know how it is to handle a boat, and have been out in a lake in storms before, but they are starting to get swamped. So they wake Jesus up. I think probably to get another set of hands to bail out the boat. Like anybody who has been roused from slumber, Jesus is none too happy about it, at least when you read the Greek. It doesn't come across as well in the English translation. As I was preparing this week I came across a commentator who said that reading the gospel in the original Greek is like seeing it in color. Reading the gospels in a translation is like seeing them in black & white. You get a little better translation.

So, Jesus is roused up. One of the great things about being part of a congregation that has more than one pastor, and several different chances to worship, is that you get more than one interpretation. At the 8:15 service this morning, when I sat in to listen to Pastor Hardy, I got a whole different version of what I am about to tell you. In our translation, and that is the way Pastor Hardy presented it, Jesus said, "Peace! Be still." His wonderful calming words. But when we look at this passage in color, I mean, in the Greek, we get a better English understanding. This would be "Shut up and put a muzzle on it"! He is not at all happy, which is probably not the way that most of us envision Jesus. We don't think of him as a grumpy, ticked off, impolite guy. You might think that way about me, but not about Jesus!

More often, when we think about Jesus we think about the smiling guy, or the laughing Jesus. We picture him surrounded by children, or the image that Jesus is walking around with his hand up in the air that looks like he is trying to dry his fingernail polish. We don't think of Jesus as being rube, as being grumpy or sleeping. So maybe it is a good thing to think of Jesus in this contradictory kind of way to shake up our image of Jesus. To change around the way we think of Jesus. Because God is not static, God is not stuck in a rut. Our faith is ever changing, and is always growing. Our faith from God, this message that Paul was preaching to the Corinthians, is meant for today. This is a message that is relevant right NOW. So, unlike that Love and Rockets song, "No New Tales to Tell" there is a new tale. There is a new tale every day. The new tale is as Paul wrote. Behold now is the right time, behold how is the day of salvation, because this is the message that Paul has been proclaiming, the message about what Jesus did not only in the boat, but more importantly on the cross. That message is fresh and new and for today. It is as meaningful in the 21st Century as it was in the 1st.

There is a new tale. A tale that might seem to be filled with contradictions, at least according to the way the world looks at things, the way the world is striving to earn a love that is, in fact, freely given, so behold now is the time to stop rejecting that unending love of God. Paul ended his section today, open wide your heart (or as in color, open wide your gut) and accept that love, and be filled with that grace and to tell others to be a witness to God in whatever we do, wherever we are.

Amen.