

Powerful Whispers

Listening to that miraculous account recorded in the Gospel lesson for today, I have to wonder, placed in those same circumstances, who wouldn't immediately drop *everything* and follow Jesus? ***The miraculous abundance is so great that it's literally sinking your boat!*** Thanks to that miracle—***because of that powerful miracle***—the disciples immediately understand they're in the presence of almighty God, and it terrifies them. Peter falls on his face and cries out, "*Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!*" He knows his sinful reality, and he knows what that sinful reality means when standing before a just and holy God. So when God Himself, in mercy, tells him to not be afraid and instead follow Him and be catching men, Peter and the boys immediately obey. ***Duh! Who among us wouldn't?***

Unfortunately, though, that's often not how God works. God often works in "little whispers," i.e., things/ways we often miss or don't pay any attention to or ***outright dismiss*** because ***surely, if this was from God, it would be bigger, right?*** There's also the even worse fact that there are times that God ***does*** work mighty things, and people, for whatever reason, still reject Him. Consider Queen Jezebel. Even ***after*** the miraculous, fiery display that ultimately led to the humiliation and death of 450 false prophets of Baal, wicked Queen Jezebel only dug in her heels more, vowing to destroy Elijah by the same time tomorrow. That great and powerful miracle of God had no appreciable effect on her! Consequently, Elijah is left feeling eviscerated. He heads for the hills in ***fear and disgust and a profound sense of hopelessness***, eventually hiding out in a cave. "*God, this is pointless. Why even bother? Just let me die already! I quit!*"

This is where God finds Elijah. "*Elijah, what are you doing here?*" God asks this simple question because ***Elijah wasn't where God had called him to be. Elijah had gone AWOL.*** But rather than punish him for his cowardly disobedience, God, in His mercy, instructs Elijah to go out and stand at the entrance of his cave hiding place, where He then puts on a powerful and miraculous display, showing Elijah a mountain-splitting tornado, and then an earthquake, and then a raging fire. ***But... God wasn't in any of those miraculous, powerful displays of terror.*** That's when a faint, low whisper—almost inaudible—comes from back inside the cave. You see... God was making a point to Elijah. He wasn't in the huge and miraculous. ***He was in the lowly whisper. The point: He had been with Elijah all along!***

What about me? That's ***really*** the question we're all concerned about, isn't it? How many of you think that following Jesus and walking the walk of faith would be ***so much easier*** if He just gave you some powerful miracles to hold on to; to work with? How many of you, like Elijah, struggle and lament when it

seems like you're all alone and the powerful/miraculous signs you're looking for and expecting aren't coming to fruition? How many of you have ***put God to the test*** by playing the little game, "*God, if you don't want me to do this, give me a sign*"? You know... you ask for a divine sign, and then you wait for lightning; you wait for the heavens to rend; you wait for the earthquake... but then nothing happens, so it must mean that God is okay with you doing whatever your little heart is leading you to do, right?

On the flip-side, how often does it take something powerfully tragic to blind side you and wake you up to just how far off the Lighted Way you've strayed? You know how it is... life is good; you're on cruise-control; not a worry in the world, ***and then it happens: Tragedy jumps you, beats you down, and takes your wallet.*** "*Why, God?! Why me?!*" It's amazing how "religious" people can get ***after*** they get their rear end handed to them and they realize they're not immune to the symptoms and realities of sin. My question is: Why would it take fire from heaven to get us to turn our backs on sin? Why, like the disciples, does it take a near-death experience or some other "powerful punch" to wake us up and get us "lined out," finally able to recognize the darkness we're walking in? ***Why do we often have to be terrified into following God?***

I guess the answer comes down to the simple fact that God works His miracles of repentance, restoration, and salvation in very ***humble and ordinary*** ways; ways that we so often ***ignore or disregard***. God doesn't work the way we expect (or desire). Look no further than the suffering and death of God Himself in the flesh. **Yes: This is almighty God, in the flesh.** ***Not very impressive, is it?*** If we could draw up the plan, we would do it differently, wouldn't we? Is it any wonder why so many people rejected Him and mocked Him (and still do)? Is it any wonder why even His own apostles tucked tail and headed for the hills when all this went down? ***Talk about unexpected and undesirable!*** This isn't supposed to happen, especially to God! God is supposed to win; not the bad guys!

And yet... this ***is*** God's plan of victory. This is the ultimate victory, first foretold and promised by God Himself in the Garden of Eden. All the powers of sin, death, and the devil were crushed and put to death for all time right here on Christ's cross. ***The really sad thing is that the rest of nature WAS making this miracle abundantly clear.*** The skies turned black. The earth quaked. Boulders and mountains split open. The huge temple curtain was rent, from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. Even some dead people were resurrected! No one seemed to get it; no one except one lone Roman soldier. "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

After all this (and after the promise of Christ that on the third day He would rise again in victory), the apostles were ***still*** hiding in a lowly cave of a room. ***Like Elijah hiding in the cave, they were dejected because things hadn't worked at all the way they expected.*** You can hear it in the two disciples while on their way to

Emmaus. “*We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel, but the chief priest and the leaders crucified Him.*” They just didn’t get it. They didn’t get it because it wasn’t what they had expected or desired. When you get down to it, they didn’t get it because they never really paid attention or listened to the “whisper” of the Word of God. “*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?*” And with that, our Lord led them back to the Scriptures, interpreting and explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Okay... and here’s why all this matters to you: **What does your Lord say to you (albeit in the whisper of Holy Scripture)?** What has He said about the wage of sin—***ALL sin, your sin included?*** More importantly, what has He done to pay that deadly wage in full, for you, for me, and for all the children of Adam? Scripture; i.e., God’s own Word to you (“*all Scripture is breathed out by God*”), doesn’t just whisper this. It boldly proclaims it! God Himself took on flesh and shed blood in death for you! ***This [the cross] is how much He loves you!***

By grace, through faith—through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit in these, His little “whispers” that are His means of grace—we can have the confidence/peace to follow Him wherever He leads us; wherever He calls us, ***even when it means that following entails cross-bearing.*** Where does your Lord call you to be, even in the midst of your sorrows; even as you bear your crosses? *This is why we do this “thing” called “Divine Service.” I sometimes wonder how much stuttering and fear we’d exude if our Lord caught us on a Sunday morning on the golf course or in bed, asking, “*Why are you here?*” Properly understood, Christians don’t gather on Sunday mornings to serve the Divine. Contrary to what our egos often like to believe, the Almighty doesn’t ***need*** our worship. Rather, Christians “sabbath” (as He commands), that is, we take a little time to rest so that the Divine can serve us and nurture us; i.e., “Divine service.” In that regard, then, what has He ***already*** said concerning His presence with you ***always***; how He’ll never leave you or forsake you? ***God has never missed a worship service!*** “*Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among you.*” And as far as being/feeling forsaken... **He was forsaken for you.** He was forsaken by our heavenly Father so that you would ***never*** have to know/experience a single second of it in your own undeserving life. Your almighty God is only a Scripture reading away; a prayer away!

Along those same lines, let us not forget the comfort and consolation that Christians receive, not just in worship or from the Word of God in Holy Scripture whenever they open the pages and listen to Him, but whenever a fellow Christian shares His Word in holy conversation, listening to your hurts and struggles and griefs, bearing your burdens with you, and then bespeaking, not their own worldly,

counterfeit version of “peace,” ***but the peace of the Almighty to you and for you in that moment.***

And even if you should somehow find yourself alone, without another Christian to share your burdens (may that never be the case!), what has your Lord already said regarding the whisper of water in Holy Baptism, and how you bear His holy name; how you belong to Him? What has He said regarding the “small whisper” that is His Body and His Blood in, with, and under the ordinary elements of bread and wine; the Body and Blood of the Almighty, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin; for the peace that surpasses all understanding?

You know... when all this is understood and recognized through the eyes and ears of faith, it’s all so very powerful and miraculous! In all these things ***here is the Almighty Himself, right where He tells you to seek Him; right where He promises to be.*** Yes, it’s the equivalent of a lowly whisper, but do not be deceived! Here is Christ the Lord for you, with you now and with you always, to the very end of the age.

May this powerful miracle that is God’s undeserved, unconditional, and ever-present love for you guard you and keep you, through the good times and the bad times into life everlasting. And as you walk the walk of faith, taking up your crosses and following Him wherever He may lead, may you ever and always be at peace, holding fast in faith to the Gospel reality (as He has already promised in His Word) that He is always working ***all*** things for your good and for the good of all those who love Him; the Gospel reality that you belong to Him, and He is with you always, in the good times, in the bad times... ***always***, to the end of the age and into all eternity.

AMEN