

The Sore Thumb of God

If something is obvious and plain-as-day to see, we often say that it “sticks out like a sore thumb.” You can’t miss it. In looking over our Old Testament and Gospel lessons for today, this “sore thumb” reality is recognized in the phrase “the finger of God.” ***Both texts use this peculiar phrase to describe God’s miraculous working.*** Its right there, plain-as-day. You can’t miss it. Pharaoh’s magicians can’t replicate the plague of gnats, and they tell Pharaoh (with fear in their voice), “*This is the finger of God.*” Jesus Himself tells the naysayers who just witnessed Him cast out demons from a poor woman that “*this is the finger of God.*” The problem in both instances? In spite of the fact that God’s work was sticking out like a sore thumb for all to see, ***people still refused to believe it.*** They ***refused*** to see what was so plain-as-day and right in front of their faces. Pharaoh hardens his heart, and Jesus’ naysayers harden their hearts and close their eyes, either attributing Jesus’ work to the devil or demanding more proof, as if what they had already witnessed wasn’t enough to convince them.

Now, it’s very easy to shake our heads and look down at these fools. After all, the finger of God is sticking out like a sore thumb, and they still refuse to believe. And yet...I wouldn’t be too quick to condemn Pharaoh here. ***Why?!*** The answer lies within the text of the Gospel lesson. You see, the name “Beelzebul,” which the naysayers attribute Jesus’ miraculous works to, is an old Canaanite word that means “lord of the flies.” For those of you needing a refresher, the Canaanites were the “bad guys.” They didn’t worship Yahweh. They worshipped the false god Baal. “Beelzebul” breaks down to “the Baal of the flies,” more specifically, “*the Baal/lord of those who dwell on and feed off of stench and rot and death and decay.*” This same “god of the flies” was known and, to some extent, worshipped by the Egyptians. You had to keep him happy, or else he would send death, decay, and flies upon you.

Think about that for a moment. Almighty God is using ***pestilences*** of gnats and flies to try and get Pharaoh to see and listen to the Truth and repent. God is using ***plague and disaster*** to try and make Himself known; to try and draw Pharaoh to Him in repentance and faith. I don’t know about you, but looking out over a fly-infested wasteland isn’t exactly ***inviting***. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar, right? And yet God is using the ***bitter gall of death and rot and decay*** to try and break Pharaoh and turn him from death to life. Maybe God doesn’t understand how to grow a Church.

Folks: What exactly is God doing with this display? ***Answer: He’s showing Pharaoh who is boss!*** In a very ironic and real way, God is showing Pharaoh that He is “the Lord of the lord of the flies.” The false god they worship;

the demon who leads them astray with such false worship and false comfort and security, can do **nothing** apart from God's will. Moses' God and Lord—**our God and Lord**—is the Almighty One (singular). There is no other. The lord of the flies answers to Him. Beelzebul has **NO POWER OR AUTHORITY** over the Lord of Life. The strong man that is the lord of the flies is bound up, overcome, and put down by the stronger God of Israel. It's not even a contest. ***And Pharaoh's magicians recognize plain-as-day what's going on here.*** They see it. The almighty and all-powerful finger of Yahweh is at work and triumphing over their gods. "*Pharaoh, this Yahweh is the real deal. You might want to re-think your plans.*" But Pharaoh refuses to see. He refuses to listen. He hardens his heart to the sore thumb that is God's almighty finger working in his midst.

Again, it's easy to see how stupid and stubborn Pharaoh is here, but it's a whole different ballgame when it comes to seeing that same sinful reflection staring back at you from the mirror. This is why I cautioned that I wouldn't be too quick to condemn him. I'm well aware of the world we live in. Look around. I don't know about you, but I see a lot of flies. There's a stench of death and decay—***moral, godless rot***—that is permeating our land, our homes, and our lives. There are times that it looks like evil has the upper-hand, and it only seems to be getting worse every day.

And don't think for a second that this doesn't trespass into your life of faith. It does affect how you see things. Life gets tough; we begin to feel the pain and sorrow of the crosses we bear; tragedy hits, ***and we don't always see God's loving Fatherly fingers at work, do we?*** Understand: I'm not accusing anyone of being a hard-hearted, God-denying unbeliever like Pharaoh or the wicked naysayers who harassed and rejected Jesus, but I am saying that ***we don't always hold fast to that which we so boldly claim to believe.*** It's easy to be a Christian when things are going great. It's quite another thing, though, to remain faithful as your world is crashing down on you. We don't always recognize Fatherly love disciplining us and calling us to repent and hold fast to Him. ***Sometimes we only see wrath and punishment and despair, if we see God at all.*** "*God, give me a sign. Something is really wrong here. Give me something so I can know that You're still with me; that You still love me; that You still care about me.*" **Really?!** Maybe the problem is not that God has wandered away from and abandoned you, ***but that you have wandered away from Him.*** Turn around! As far as asking God for a sign/proof that He still loves you, He's ***already*** given you a sign. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for it.

Sadly, though, even that is sometimes not enough. Jesus said this of the Pharisees who were demanding a sign—proof—of His authority. "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the*

belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jesus pointed those looking for proof of God’s finger in action to His own death and resurrection. Sadly, even that wouldn’t be enough. *“They won’t be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.”* ***What’s really sad is that what Christ said of the Pharisees can just as easily be said of us.*** *“I know Jesus died for me, but God, give me a sign so I can know that You still love me.”*

Folks: Here is the sign and proof of God’s love for you. Here it is, hung on a cross for you. ***This isn’t just a sore thumb; it’s a broken and bloodied corpse.*** Yes, to the eyes of man this does look like defeat. I get it. This looks like Beelzebul won, but Jesus—almighty God Himself in the flesh—declared victoriously from this cross that He won. The fight is finished, once and for all. Saving faith—***the new man who has been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection***—hears this and believes this; holds fast to this. I love the irony here. Here on this cross of shameful defeat is the Lord of Life triumphing over sin, death, and the devil! Saving faith is able to see this because saving faith hears and believes Christ. Here is where Almighty God has lifted up and shown us that ***He is the stronger One.*** Here is where the Lord of Life has bound up and put down the wicked masters we know as sin, death, and the devil. This is where the victory was fought and won! And three days after crushing the head of that wicked and ancient serpent; ***three days after defeating the lord of the flies***, the Lord of Life rises again, proving to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear that **death has no dominion over Him.**

And make no mistake: Your Lord knows our frailties and our weaknesses, which is why He continues to work this sign/miracle of life in your midst. Here it is, ***His loving Fatherly fingers*** reaching down from heaven to unplug your ears and open your eyes; to breathe His life-giving Holy Spirit/breath into you; to place His mark upon your head and your heart, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the Lord, washing you with His Holy Baptism; to feed you and nourish you with His resurrected and victorious Body and Blood. Look here. Look to this rail. ***No matter how bad things may get in life, here is your Lord of Life, right where He has promised to be, now and to the end of the age.*** The Light of Christ shines forth. It pierces the darkness of this fallen and sinful world. This Light the darkness cannot and will not overcome.

May this Light, this joy, this peace shine forth ***in you and through you*** all your remaining days. May the Light and Love of Christ stick out like a sore thumb in all that you say and do, so that others may see and give glory to their God and Father.

In Christ’s holy name and to His glory...AMEN.