

Does Jesus Care?

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ!

In his book titled 'Letter to a Man in a Fire', cancer survivor and Christian writer, Reynolds Price, receives letters from 'people all around the world' who are struggling (like he was) with illness, uncertainty, and with questions...

And in one of the letters that he receives from a medical student named Jim (who has developed his own life-threatening cancer) it says, *"I want to believe in a God who cares...because I may meet him sooner than I had expected... and I think I am at the point where I can accept the existence of God...but I can't yet believe that God cares about me"...*

In another story I read (in an article this week) - a woman, who lost her home in Hurricane Ida - and her husband to Covid late last year - found herself at her breaking point... and in a conversation with her pastor she was asked whether or not she knew "how much God cares?"... And she too expressed her struggle of faith when she says, *"Yes, I do believe that God cares - but He doesn't seem to care about me right now"...*

In our reading this morning from the 4th chapter of Mark's Gospel there's a similar struggle going on in the hearts and minds of the disciples... because it says that as they were going to the 'other side' (presumably the other side of the Sea of Galilee) a great storm arises seemingly out of nowhere - threatens to sink the ship - and take their lives...

and out of the corner of their eye - and in a panic - they see Jesus asleep (and it tells us that they wonder out loud), "Do you not care that we are perishing?"... "Do you not care - about us?"...

You know, I would guess that all of us have wrestled with that question at one point or another - whether it was triggered by Super storm Sandy a few years back or perhaps through our own losses that we have experienced during the Pandemic, an unexpected illness, the sudden loss of a job, the death of a loved one - it seems to me that when storms (like those) arise without warning - when our lives are threatened and suddenly change course - and when God seems to be asleep on the job - I think it's natural to also wonder from time to time, "Do you not care that we are perishing?"... "Do you not care - about us?"...

In fact, even King David (one of the major heroes of the Bible) had his own moment of doubt when he cries out in Psalm 13:1, *“How long, O Lord?... Will you forget me forever?... How long will you hide your face from me?”*... and the question King David was asking is the same question we have asked at one point or another, *“Does God not care – about us?”*...

Let me shift gears for a moment and tell you that I grew up in a church that encouraged questions like that one... and when I went off to Chicago - the motto of my seminary was, *“Where all of your answers will be questioned”*... and the reason for having questions, and encouraging one another to do the same, was never to lose one’s faith (nor were questions considered a lack of faith or meant to sound disrespectful to our Lord) – but instead it was seen as a way to let faith live inside of our hearts with integrity, and honesty, and ultimately– with a sense of rich truth (that can only be had when we wrestle with angels)...

And I love what a good friend of mine once said from the pulpit (in relationship to the question – Where is God in Times of Trouble?) ... she said, *“Although it may seem at times that God is far away, absent at times, or even asleep – the Christian faith continues to declare boldly just the opposite – that not only does God love us and care for us – but He walks with us through the suffering, through the trials, and through the tragedies that sometimes plague our lives”* ... and then went on to say, *“ and you can only discover that truth by searching for evidence of that claim - on your own”* ...

Respected author and pastor, Tim Keller, also says something that I think is important for us to remember... he says, *“There’s no shame in wondering about God’s whereabouts – especially when storms rage – but if you really want to know where God can be found in times of trouble – you’ll find the answer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ”* ...

In other words, the god that we worship is not afraid of messy situations that are plagued by death and despair (as our Lord’s death on the cross most certainly reveals) but it’s precisely because of the cross (and in the suffering) that we find the depth of God’s love most clearly expressed... Reminding us that God enters into our suffering (and cares for us in our times of need)... that God comes to us in our storms and suffers alongside of us...

Or as Christian author and past, John Ortberg, once said, *“He has been with us – right there in the boat – all along”* (wanting our own spirits to be at peace - and be still!)...

Do you know – can I tell you something?... I have found the truth of those words so many times in my own life – (that Jesus has been in my boat when the storms of life were brewing) - whether it be in the care and support of loved ones who've helped me get through difficulties, the acceptance I felt when I returned to my home parish (after a brief hiatus) not only by the congregation – but by our loving pastor who led me back to Jesus), or even in the last year as we have journeyed through this Pandemic – God has proven to me again and again that He is not only with me in times of trial (but as it says in that Footprints poem – I know that He has carried me as well)...

And how do I know this?... how do I know that God has been with me in my own boat?... and that it has been God who has helped me through my own storms?...

I know it because looking through the lens of my faith I see that I have been cared for again and again – I have watched His many promises come true in my own life (and in this ministry) - and I'm trusting that God not only cares for me in this world – but will care for me in the world to come...

And all God asks – when the storms begin to rage in your own life – is to trust that He is with you (as well)...

As you know, I always close with a story – and I know that I have shared this story twice in the last 10 years – but it was a story that kept coming back to me this week that I think fits in well with my message this morning... It's a story about a pastor who is on a flight home one evening and he noticed some turbulence and the 'fasten seatbelt' light come on... followed by an announcement that said, "*there would be no beverages served due to the turbulence*"...

The turbulence was getting worse – and it was becoming obvious that everyone was getting very nervous... finally, another announcement was made saying that there would be 'no meals served' because the turbulence showed no sign of letting up...

Everyone was asked to make their seats go upright - and the pastor noticed a few people crying, many people praying, and everyone could feel the plane being lifted up one moment (and what seemed like crashing down the next)... it was obvious that they were encountering a terrible storm and many people thought the plane might go down...

But out of the corner of his eye he noticed one little girl who didn't seem bothered at all by what was happening... she just kept reading her book, and

everything about this little girl just seemed so calm and peaceful... she even seemed to have a smile on her face the whole time (with that little book in her hands)...

Well, to keep a long story short the plane landed without crashing and everyone was relieved (including the pastor)... but he had to find out what made that little girl so special... why wasn't she afraid?... why did she seem so peaceful and calm when everyone else on the plane was worried sick?...

And so the pastor asked the girl her secret... and the little girl simply said, "Because my daddy is the pilot – and I knew he was going to take me home?"...

And I share that story this morning because there are many storms that may come into our own lives from time to time- Physical, mental, financial, (and many other storms that can easily and quickly darken our skies)... but before any one of us lets them shake us up, scare us, or make us wonder whether or not God cares for us (like the disciples did in our story this morning) – take the time (especially on this day) and remember who's taking us home, who's steering the ship and who's flying the plane – it's God (who says in His Word again and again that He loves us and will be with us – even unto the end of the ages)...

And as it says in Romans 8:31, "*If God is for us who then can be against us?*"...

May God order your steps, May He bless your endeavors, and may your lips never stop praising the Lord for His goodness (and His care for your soul)...

In Jesus name we pray...

Amen!