

WHO RULES?

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John 18:33–37

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” 35 Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me.

In our sermon last Sunday, we indicated at this time of the year before we begin to share the songs and message of Advent and Christmas, we are reminded again of the scriptures of Jesus as he prepares for crucifixion, experiences resurrection, and then ascends to the Father. It is there, after we have traveled with Jesus as he taught us about the Kingdom we find some of the same feelings surface that some had when he physically walked among us.

I remember a class I was teaching to a group of early teens in a class to prepare them to know some of the basics as they prepared for membership in the church. I had done what our annual travel through the calendar year in the church does for all of us each year. We touched on the key events in the life of Jesus and a summary of the basic teaching covered in the four gospels and then an overview of the birth of the church and the growth of that church as we read the journeys of Paul and other apostles down through the centuries to the present age. After I had finished the course one young man asked me, **“Preacher, is this as good as it gets?”** He wanted to know, in essence, if the mission of our Lord had failed.

My friends, we live in a world in turmoil. Everyday people are engulfed by the storms of life. All around us is chaos and devastation. At times, it seems, things are so bad that it’s hard to believe that a good God created this world with all its terror and violence. So, the question for us today is a little like that young man’s question, “Is this as good as it gets?” But I would like to pose a different question, **“How will we respond?”** If we respond by wondering if this is as good as it gets, **Are we going to hunker down in fear? Or in our fear will we call on the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and have faith that he can, does, and will continue to make a difference?**

We are not the first to experience fear or frustration. It has been among us since the day the world was spoken into existence.

So, is not surprising that we see the word **“fear”** surface through our scriptures. A lot of that fear has to do with our understanding of who God is and what we see him to accomplish. Jesus has been with his disciples as he taught them, they have been with Jesus as he taught us, and yet at the very end we still find the discussion Jesus has with Pilate. Pilate wants to know who Jesus is and so he asks him directly, **“Are you the king of the Jews?”**

Jesus tries to explain to him something that even the church across the centuries have had troubles explaining to the world. **He tells Pilate that his Kingdom is not of this world.** But, if he is the Christ, how is it, the disciples and his followers want to know, that he would allow himself to be condemned to death by Pilate? And, the followers also want to know, how safe can they be, those who have followed him be? And we modern day followers want to know if He is who He says he is, why do we still live in the kind of a world we live in today?

In chapter 16 of John and verse 33 we have other words of peace to us in our time of fear. **“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.”**

You ask me, **“Preacher where is our peace?”**

Well, there is another story from the life of Jesus that may suggest an answer.

Imagine a ship on the sea, having a fierce struggle with the waves. The storm wind is blowing harder by

the minute. The boat is small, tossed about like a toy; the sky is dark; the sailors' on board the small vessel find that their strength is failing. Then one of them is gripped by . . . whom? what? . . . he cannot tell himself. But something is there in the boat that wasn't there before. That something comes close to the sailor and lays cold hands on his arms as he pulls wildly on his oar. He feels his muscles freeze, feels the strength go out of them. Then the unknown thing reaches into his heart and mind and magically brings forth the strangest pictures. He sees his family, his children crying. What will become of them if he is no more? Then he seems to be back where he once was. He sees a neighbor whom he wounded, only yesterday, with an angry word. Suddenly he can no longer see or hear anything, can no longer row, a wave overwhelms him, and in final desperation he shrieks: "***Stranger in this boat, what are you?***" And the answer come back, "***I am Fear.***" **Now the rest of the crew** hear that fear is in the boat; all arms are frozen and drop their oars; all hope is lost. **Fear is in the boat.**

Then it is as if the heavens opened, as if the heavenly hosts themselves raised a shout of victory in the midst of hopelessness: Christ is in the boat. Christ is in the boat, and no sooner has the call gone out and been heard than Fear shrinks back, and the waves subside. The sea becomes calm and the boat rests on its quiet surface. Christ was in the boat!

Many are on a voyage across a storm-tossed sea today. Once we heard that call that Christ is in our boat. But now, strangely enough, all of us are at sea again, on that voyage without faith, without hope, overwhelmed, paralyzed by fear; we have lost heart, lost the joy of living, our limbs heavy as lead; each of us knows what it's like. Perhaps, or most likely, we don't even quite realize what has happened to us; we are already so used to this state of affairs that it seems natural to us, and we almost like it that way, all this misery around us and in our own lives.

But look here, right in the middle of this fearful world is a story that screams from scripture to be heard again.

It keeps calling over and over but always anew, in the same tone, the same message: **Fear is overcome; don't be afraid** [John 16:33]. In the world you are frightened. But be comforted; I have conquered the world! Christ is in the boat!

You of little faith, why are you so fearful? In these words, we must hear all the disappointment of Jesus Christ in his disciples and all his love for them. Do you still not know that you are in God's hands, that where I am, God is? Why are you so fearful? Be of good courage, strong, firm, sure, confident, not shaking with fear. Don't hang your heads; don't complain about what bad times these are. Christ is in the boat, in the nave of this church. So why not hear him and believe him?

When the disciples were climbing aboard the boat, they seemed quite confident; they seemed not at all afraid. Why were they confident? They looked at the lovely calm sea and saw no reason to worry. But as the wind and waves increased in force, the disciples lost their calm and fear grew in them. They gazed apprehensively at the wild sea. Its appearance had made them feel safe, but now fear was gaining the upper hand. The story says that Jesus was asleep. Only faith can sleep without a care—that is why sleep is a reminder of paradise—faith finds its safety in God alone. The disciples couldn't sleep; their security was gone; their confidence had been misplaced and now was lost. It was a false sense of security—it was only fear in disguise. This sense of security does not overcome fear and soon breaks down. Only the faith that leaves behind all false confidence, letting it fall and break down, can overcome fear. This is faith: it does not rely on itself or on favorable seas, favorable conditions; it does not rely on its own strength or on other people's strength, but believes only and alone in God, whether or not there is a storm. It is the only faith that is not superstition and does not let us slip back into fear but makes us free of fear. Lord, make this faith strong in us who have little faith!

However, it does seem to be true, what you have surely all been quietly wanting to say for some time, that today Christ is no longer doing such amazing things. He is so strangely hidden away that we often think he

is no longer there at all!

But the disciples were amazed, saying, ***“What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”*** We can well understand their amazement. What sort of person is this on whom fear has no effect, who overcomes the fear in human life and takes away its power? By asking this question, we are already on our knees before him, praying to him, pointing to him, the wonder worker, and saying, ***“This is God!”***

I think that’s one of the things that plays into the problem with the disciples and the storm on the Sea of Galilee. It’s a familiar setting, fishermen in a boat on the Sea. And they must have encountered storms before. So it seems that there’s probably something more contributing to the disciples’ fear here. When Jesus tells his disciples, ***“Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake,”*** this command was about more than just a change of scenery, because on the other side of that sea was Gentile territory. And this was Jesus’ and the disciples’ first mission trip into a land that almost any Jew of that day would have considered a dangerous and even inappropriate place to go. And so as we read the story of the mighty storm at sea, I wonder if these veteran fishermen weren’t just as afraid of where they were heading as they were about the storm itself.

But Jesus wasn’t afraid. In fact, Jesus was fast asleep! And when the disciples, in a panicked frenzy, wake Jesus up, the question foremost on their minds is, ***“Don’t you care?” Don’t you care, Jesus, about this terrible storm? Don’t you care that we are scared out of our minds? Don’t you care that we might die???”*** Knowing that these disciples have likely encountered such storms at sea before, the whole scene suddenly seems quite ridiculous, doesn’t it? It’s like the little child who falls and scrapes his knee. And the way he cries out and carries on for the next hour or so, you would think the world was coming to an end! And so it seems with the disciples. But Jesus keeps things in perspective as he calmly rebukes the wind and waves into submission. And then he turns the question on the disciples. The disciples’ question, ***“Don’t you care?”*** is answered with a simple, ***“Don’t you have faith?”***

It seems so basic. A very simple question, and yet it stands at the heart of Christian discipleship. Faith gives us the courage to weather the storms. Faith builds confidence in our ability to venture into foreign territory. Faith brings hope. And I do believe that the more we venture out with Jesus; the more we take the chance with Christ to cross into new territory and new ministry to serve new and more people, the less afraid of this sort of thing we become, and the more peace that floods our souls! For we learn that when we are living within the will of God, there really is nothing to be afraid of. And if we fail? Well, we weren't doing this for our sake in the first place anyway, right? So Jesus can calm storms, both the literal kind with rain and wind, and the kind that stir up inside of our hearts and minds. But at the same time, he calls on us to have faith.

This is the Sunday when the church takes stock of itself and the world and once again asserts before the world who is in charge, who rules, who sits on the throne, who reigns from a cross: Jesus Christ, the world’s true sovereign.

It can make a powerful difference to know who sits on the throne that is above all earthly thrones, the monarch whose kingdom is “not from here.” Here, we have feuding, factions, setbacks, and grief, but in Christ, we’ve been given a privileged peek of where it’s all headed. We haven’t seen the play’s last scene yet, but we have seen enough to keep us in high hopefulness.

In the present, there are setbacks, sorrows, sadness, and life’s big and little tragedies. We are frustrated by our impotence to change the world or to work things out as we think we ought. In such moments, knowing who sits on the throne is so important.

You have heard me say from time to time that we can live longer without food and water than we can live without hope.

The most precious and priceless possession of any human heart or life is this: that we have hope. However dark or dreary, however hard and implacable our way if we have a hope, anything can be endured.

But anything becomes unendurable and the whole earth is filled with darkness and despair when hope

dies away.

The psalmist sang: **"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God . . . For He is the help of thy countenance."** However it is on the outside, what does it matter? The storm clouds lower and the day is as dark as the night, and the night has no dawning. However it is in this world and in this life, listen to the psalmist as he'll sing of the confidence we have in God.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him will I trust." Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noise of pestilence.

He shall cover you with His feathers . . .

Do you ever think about the Bible as you read it? When I was younger we lived on a farm and we had some chickens. We have some mother hens who would lay eggs and then hatch out a whole bunch of little chicks. I love to watch the little fluffy chickens as they scurried around never far from the mother hen. If something got the attention of the mother hen she would make a certain cluck and they the little ones would all come running and gather round her feet as she gently settled down and covered them with her wings. And it just looked like the warmest, safest place in the world to me – those little peeping chickens underneath the feathers of that mother hen.

And when I read this, I always think of that: **"He shall cover thee with His feathers."** And however it is on the outside, we just stay under the wings of the Lord and just "Peep, peep, peep, peep." That's all. By faith we gather knowing that we are in God's care.

IT IS A MATTER OF FAITH

The Christian is in the hand of God, and there is he held [[John 10:28-30](#)]; and he abides under the wings, under the feathers, of the Almighty. That's the Christian hope.

May the God of Hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

There's a basis for the Christian hope and the Christian persuasion, and Paul says that it lies in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The least little one of us that has put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – we all are going to make it.

That's the perseverance of the saints.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,

Is laid for your faith In His excellent word!

What more can He say than to you He hath said,

You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

And do you remember your witnesses in church singing,

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,

I'll never, no never desert to its foes;

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake;

I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

And those little chicks under the sheltering wings of the mother hen must have known something about the next verse.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,

I'll never, no never desert to its foes;

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake;

I'll never, no never, no never forsake.