

“Saved!”

Gen. 37:3-4, 18-22, 25-28; Romans 10:8b-13; Mt. 14:25-33

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How many of you have connections with the Roman Catholic church? NOT a trick question. This is NOT some form of ‘protestant persecution.’ On contrary, I want to celebrate their emphasis on Scripture, particularly as expressed in the RCL. Which many Protestant churches utilize as well. Including THIS one. I find it rather comforting to know that whatever differences we may have in our expressions of Christian faith, we can come together on any given Sunday and be considering some of the SAME Bible passages... with fellow believers around the WORLD!

And while I will often focus on one or two of the 3 passages ...one each from the O.T., Epistle, and Gospel; we most always use the 4th, from Psalms, to call ourselves to worship... this week ALL 3 merit our attention. ALL 3 are ones that deserve to be in our spiritual ‘quiver’ of Bible passages that can help us to ‘fend off the attacks’ of the evil one on our everyday lives. ALL 3 stand alone in their significance, while also sharing in a common theme.

The O.T. passage concerning Joseph and his brothers speak to family dynamics, and their impact on the spiritual life of the family. And particularly how two brothers took an unpopular stand in order to intervene in the planned demise of their youngest sibling... to ‘save’ him from death.

The Gospel reading concerned how Jesus rescued **disciples** from the storm, but particularly **Peter**, who called on Jesus to keep him from drowning after asking to join him and getting frightened. Jesus reached out and held on to Peter, in order to ‘save’ him from death.

And finally, the Apostle Paul tells us that if we believe in our hearts, and confess with our mouths, that **“Jesus is Lord,”** we will be saved. *These three each speak to how the actions of Jesus, of loved ones, and of ourselves, can lead one to be **“Saved!”** from death... to be spared earthly FEAR by an eternal FAITH.*

There are many good lessons in the relationship of Joseph and his brothers with their father Jacob... who is now known as Israel (‘he who struggles with God.’ ALL of us!) One is NOT TO SHOW FAVORITES! How long did it take us to realize that Dad was making a big mistake by **“loving Joseph more than any other of his children.”** A love clearly greater than Jacob (Israel)

had for his other children by giving him a **“long robe with sleeves.”** Aka, a ‘coat of many colors.’ (colored cloth = ++\$\$ in that culture; wasn’t as easy or cheap as running down to the local Walmart!) Or, as it was referred to in a popular Christian musical back in the 70’s, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.”

Because of this extravagant demonstration of Dad’s love for little brother, it would come as no shock that **“they hated him. (and) conspired to kill him.”** (Not that Joseph didn’t do some things to alienate himself from his sibs: sharing with them a dream in which his ‘sheave of wheat’ was being bowed down to my all the others ‘sheaves’; and ratting out his brothers to Dad for how they were not doing their jobs correctly). This being said, the truth is that Showing favoritism in any context... family, business, societal, church... will most always lead to conflict and resentment.

And that is why we must lift up the example of Reuben and Judah. Two brothers who stood up against their family members to do the right thing. Even though they had reasons to resent Joseph... even though they would take an unpopular stance in how to deal with him... they listened to their **conscience**. The Spirit of God spoke to them, and through them, that Joseph should be SAVED. Because, in Judah’s words, **“he is our brother, our own flesh.”** (Gen. 37:27)

It was this same ‘Spirit of God’ who spoke ‘to and through’ Jesus to take a miraculous ‘stroll’ on stormy seas to SAVE his very own brothers. Particularly Peter... that impetuous, impulsive, inconsistent disciple who would later become the ‘rock’ on which our Christian Church would be founded. Who on this particular ‘dark and stormy night’ would wind up SINKING ‘like a rock.’

You GOTTA love Peter. We SHOULD... because he’s just like US! Just consider what happened when he saw the Lord Jesus walking on the water in the midst of that storm. **“Lord, IF it IS you, command me to come to you on the water.”** (Mt. 14:28) ‘IF it is you’?! How many OTHER Saviors might Peter be expecting to see out there? OK, the weather conditions were pretty bad, so visibility COULD be a factor. But it was likely more along the lines of DOUBT that their Lord, as miraculously as they had seen him act before, could really DO such a miracle as this.

But he was hedging his feelings of doubt with wanting to share in this powerful, 'super-natural' act of 'bare-footing,' Jesus-style. 'Lord, call me out so that I can experience this exhilarating miracle for myself. After all, I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU!'

And I have to wonder what was going through Jesus' mind here. He had to be thinking, 'Peter, Peter, Peter... do you know what you are asking? You are definitely still in training. You're not ready for this.' But rather than tell him, 'Why don't you just wait in the boat,' Jesus simply says... **"Come."**

And, of course, Peter does. Boldly steps out of the boat into the stormy, wave-tossed seas. And for a while, his faith is strong enough to keep him 'afloat.' But then it begins to 'sink in' just what he is doing. 😊 Something no mere mortal should be able to do. And when the 'gravity' of his action hits him, so does fear and doubt. And he begins to sink. When he realizes that he is about to get in 'way over his head,' Peter cries out, **"Lord, save me!"** (Mt. 14:30) To which Jesus replies, 'No, you're doing just fine. Just move your feet a little faster in treading water.' Not quite. It says that **"Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him."** (v. 31)

Without hesitation... with no second thought... Jesus instinctively, 'immediately,' extended his hand to his brother Peter to 'catch him.' Jesus responded in the same way as he did earlier when His disciples were crying out in fear because of the storm: ***"...immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'"***(Mt. 14:27)

Friends, it is that same Jesus who also bids us to simply ***"Come!"*** Ready or not... we are to 'come.' It is that same Master and Friend who is there to also hear our cries of fear and respond. Like Peter, we may not see Him clearly. We may not really believe that Jesus could act so miraculously on our behalf. But I believe that when we cry out, ***"Lord, save me!"*** Jesus is there! By the power of His Spirit, Jesus immediately speaks to us, in the midst of our storm, ***"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*** As we seek his face through the raging winds of life, Jesus 'immediately' reaches out his hand to us in our despair; offering a 'hand up' in the midst of our disbelief. As Jesus pulls our gasping heads above the waters of doubt, He shakes his head with the same patient wisdom of His Father, whispering in our ear, ***"O you of little faith; why did you doubt?"*** Wanting only that we WOULD believe... believe that we WILL be saved...

Which brings us to that last 'arrow' of God's truth, Paul's words in Romans 10. Whenever I read this familiar passage, my mind goes back to my first call as an Associate Pastor at Spring Hill Presbyterian in Mobile. The senior pastor and I were very different cuts of cloth, but we did share what was most important: a faith and trust in Jesus as Lord. It was him who shared how important this 'affirmation of faith' in Romans 10:8ff was to him. And became very special to ME as well. And no matter how different we were, I will forever be indebted to him for that...

Paul begins by saying that ***“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...”*** (Rom. 10:8b) Is he speaking of the Word Incarnate, the Word Made Flesh, Jesus? OR the Word Written, the inspired Word of God we call “The Holy Bible”? Because THIS ‘Word’ [**hold up Bible**] points us to THAT ‘Word.’ [**point heavenward**] God's Written Word is the best way we can know and follow God's Incarnate Word, Jesus.

The Great Apostle and Evangelist goes on to write what is, for me, one of the most Divinely-inspired words in Scripture: ***“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you WILL be saved.”*** (Rom. 10:9)

Paul lays out a very simple, two-fold principle of what it really means to call ourselves “Christian.” That to be saved from the earthly death that awaits each and every one of us, it requires two things. Different, but of the same equal importance. One, confess with our lips that “Jesus is Lord.” And two, believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead. **Believe - heart. Confess - lips.** One internal. The other external. One in private silence. The other in public profession, to be shouted from the mountaintops: “Jesus IS Lord.”

In speaking of ‘public profession,’ our Presbyterian tradition is considered to be a ‘confessional’ church. We uphold the importance of statements of faith which declare, ‘before God and one another,’ WHAT WE BELIEVE. What would you consider to be our most historic ‘Confession of Faith?’ The Apostles’ Creed? The Nicene Creed? The Westminster Confession of Faith? I would argue that what we have in this verse... “Jesus IS Lord”... is the first ‘affirmation of faith.’ Three simple words that sum it all up as believers in God: **“Jesus is Lord.”** Kinda like all of the Scriptures might be summed up in five: **“Love God, Love one another.”** These three words communicate what we are to believe and how we are to live: that “Jesus is Lord” of my life. And I am going to do all I can to prove that truth is real.

As we confess, out loud, that Jesus is Lord of the world out there and the world in here (point to heart) and believe in the resurrection of his body to eternal life, WE WILL BE SAVED. The same God who used two sinful, selfish brothers to save the life of their youngest brother... the same Son of God who stilled both raging seas and anxious hearts... will save US, and those we love. We must simply believe... and confess... that ***“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”***

In reading about the ‘tempest-tossed trials’ of Jesus’ disciples, I read that Peter’s experience... And Joseph’s, for that matter... might have been ‘foreshadowed’ by a writing of the Psalmist David. Here’s the passage that was referenced, in the Living Bible translation... words that we can say as well:

“But I keep right on praying to you, Lord. For now is the time—you are bending down to hear! You are ready with a plentiful supply of love and kindness. Now answer my prayer and rescue me as you promised. ¹⁴ Pull me out of this mire. Don’t let me sink in. Rescue me from those who hate me, and from these deep waters I am in. ¹⁵ Don’t let the floods overwhelm me or the ocean swallow me; save me from the pit that threatens me. ¹⁶ O Jehovah, answer my prayers, for your loving-kindness is wonderful; your mercy is so plentiful, so tender and so kind.” (Ps. 69:13-16, TLB)

Just as Jesus responded to Peter’s ‘affliction and pain,’ so too does He to us. Let us ‘keep on praying’... for Jesus IS ‘bending down to hear.’ To ‘pull us out’... to not let us ‘sink.’ Trusting in God’s ‘tender mercy’ and ‘lovingkindness,’ may we continue to ‘confess with our lips’ and ‘believe in our hearts’... to **‘pray it and say it!’** From ‘our lips to our hips’... from the mouth on our face to the gut in our middle... may we everyday, inside and out, ‘call on the name of the Lord.’ And WE WILL BE SAVED!

**Help us to recognize your PRESENCE,
remember your PROMISE,
rely on your POWER, and
receive your PEACE through every storm. (fr. Opening prayer)**

CHARGE: In planning for worship I came across a verse of “How Firm a Foundation” that didn’t appear in either the PH or the RC hymnal I consult for use in the chapel service at Villa Maria

Retirement Home. But given the 'age and stage' of many of us, I thought it to be most appropriate. Here it is:

*Throughout all their lifetime my people shall prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love,
And then, when gray hair shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still on my shoulders be borne.*

For me, this verse speaks to the LIFELONG calling of Christians to bear witness in their lives their belief that **"Jesus is Lord!"** That, in the words of this verse, 'throughout ALL of our lifetimes' we are to be living PROOF of God's 'sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love.' That even when 'gray hair'... or NO hair... 'shall our temples adorn,' we rest secure that like lambs our Great Shepherd will carry us safely home. That in every storm, Jesus' hand reaches out to us as ones who are SAVED. As we go forth to extend that same hand to others in need to be 'saved' from their personal storms, may we NEVER forget that we don't do so alone...

OR... Later in the chapter of Romans 10 Paul writes:

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

¹⁴ But HOW are they to **call** on one in whom they have **not believed**? And HOW are they to **believe** in one of whom they have **never heard**? And HOW are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom. 10:13-15)

For those sinking into the depths of death, they must be believe... which comes from hearing. Which comes from someone proclaiming the good news. YOU AND ME. Just like those feet of Jesus who walked on the water... and the feet of Peter who tried to, and sank... remember, YOU have those same 'beautiful feet.'

And as those 'beautiful feet' leave this place to go out into the world to proclaim that good news, know that they do NOT go alone. But that the Spirit of the living God...

Questions for Reflection

Why did Jesus send the disciples ahead while he stayed to pray alone? How do times of turmoil and anxiety affect your trust in God?