

December 4, 2016  
Sermon for Second Sunday in Advent  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Psalm 107:23-32

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Psalm 107:23–32 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; <sup>24</sup> they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. <sup>25</sup> For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. <sup>26</sup> They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; <sup>27</sup> they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. <sup>29</sup> He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. <sup>30</sup> Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. <sup>31</sup> Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! <sup>32</sup> Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,  
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Dr. Martin Luther once said that “everything reveres the Word of God, through which it was created ... *except for man and the devil.*”

Our focus during this Advent and Christmas season is really an exploration of this theme: That the creation welcomes its creator and thus stands as a sign for us: a sign of judgment but also a signpost for faith and hope. It is a deeply biblical theme. Jesus himself often pointed to the creation as an example to lead His hearers into faith: the sown field, the vine and the branches, the tree and its fruit, the tiny mustard seed that grows into a great plant, even the rocks! But perhaps the most well-known is from Matthew’s Gospel —“*look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, they neither sow nor reap, weave nor spin and yet your heavenly Father feeds and clothes them. How much more will he do so for you?*”

Throughout the Scriptures the creation often stands as an irony; more responsive to God than His own people.

In a similar way the psalmist in Psalm 107 speaks of an unsettling difference between man and the rest of God's creation. The psalmist begins in verse 23 rather simply: “*Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters ...*”

At first, nothing so strange or disturbing about that. After all, human civilization arose and centered on “doing business” on the waters. Along the banks of the great rivers—the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Nile—farming emerged, cities were built, empires were born. Because water could be unpredictable in flood and drought, human genius strove to master the water: trenches were carved into the soil in order to channel the rivers into fields; irrigation systems were invented. Rafts and boats would run up and down the rivers, allowing for the transport of goods and wealth.

Even the great seas were eventually subdued as the mighty Phoenician ships cut through the Mediterranean, initiating an era of trade and travel.

It seemed that the world was man's to control—the swirling seas were merely another road to use, another power to harness for—as the psalmist puts it—*"doing business on the great water."*

But the psalmist goes on: *"they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end."*

If these people thought they were truly the captains of their own ships and masters of their own destinies, they were wrong. The sea could surge and swell, the rivers could flood their banks. They were not in control. God's mighty works of wind and wave were greater than they, and time and again the waters would unleash their power. And when this happened—at that moment—they forgot all about their business, their genius, their wealth, their imports and exports, their expanding economic and political influence. They forgot it all and cried out to God to save them.

Isn't that just the way of things? We can become so preoccupied with our own affairs that God rarely comes into the picture until we are in need. We go about our business, oblivious to the great works of God's creation all around us, beneath us, above us—the great works that make our daily lives possible.

After all, we seem to have mastered these works and bent them to our will. We have conquered the land with the car, the air with the plane, and the seas with ships. And through these we "do business"; accumulate wealth, promote trade, transport goods.

But when the creation heaves beneath us or invades and attacks, we come to terms with a fact too easily forgotten: we are finite ... we are *creatures* and we live in the midst of fellow creatures ... we are dependent and fragile.

We may think we are in control, but then it only takes a storm to drive us into our basements ... the lurching of a plane and we grip our seats in fear ... even the tiniest of things—bacteria or our own mutated cells revealed in a lab test—and we tremble, we pray, we cry out to God for help.

Sometimes it takes the howling of the wind to open our ears, or the invisible virus to open our eyes. Sometimes the creation strives against us and we are humbled. It is like a wakeup call, a call to repentance and a signpost to God who is greater than all of our great accomplishments and labors. It is even a gift, though it is a hard one. Because without such a conflict we might continue to live in self-delusion indefinitely, and this is more dangerous than any tempest. Because of our fallenness, God "*... creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*" (Rom 8:20–21)

But why do we tend to live like this? Why do we so quickly forget the lessons that God's creation teaches us and slip back into self-reliance? Perhaps it is because we tend not to believe that God is here. Oh, we probably affirm this as a doctrine—after all, God is *omnipresent*, so He is everywhere!—but in practice—in life lived—things can appear quite different. Day to day, we operate as if God is far, far removed from this world. We carry on by ourselves in practical self-sufficiency and only switch our thinking when our situation becomes terrible. Then, when we are alone and afraid, we remember God and call upon Him to come and rescue us. But when we live this way—in forgetfulness and fear—we miss something critical.

Throughout the Scriptures, God is not a distant God; on the contrary; God is truly present in this world.

Even though He transcends heaven and earth, He is, nevertheless, near to His children. In Genesis, He walks in the cool of the day through the garden with Adam and Eve. Remember, it is not God but Adam who runs away, and views God's friendly stroll as something to hide from! And yet God continues to give reminders that He is near.

He dwells in the midst of His people in the tabernacle, guiding them through the desert. Later the temple would occupy the same purpose as the tabernacle: a place of God's promised presence.

All this would culminate, of course, in the coming of Jesus, Immanuel ... God with us ... as St Paul tells us: *"in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,"* (Col 2:9).

Here in Jesus we have God's eternal and definitive promise that He will never leave us or forsake us. Here is His greatest *"steadfast love...his wondrous works to the children of man"*— His drawing near to us in the flesh that the psalmist speaks of.

Remember the time that the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee? Just like the psalm, the waters heave and surge, the wind howls, and the boat is overwhelmed. The disciples' courage melts and they are at their wits' end and then they see that Jesus is sleeping in the boat. "We're all going to die!" they cry, "don't you care?!"

It is hardly a cry for help; rather it is despair, for they do not realize who really sits in the stern of the boat. But then with a word, Jesus quiets the tempest: *"He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed"* (Ps 107:29). In wonder and awe it begins to dawn on the disciples, "Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?" The disciples know their psalms and so they know the answer, but it seems too wonderful and they can hardly grasp what this means. What it means, of course, is that the God who created all things is present with them ... He keeps company with them. He has always been with them, but now His nearness is obvious to all creation. In the presence of Jesus the wild beasts are tame, the boat doesn't sink, the lame walk, and even the stones are ready to cry out in praise.

God is not a distant resource for tough times, but stands close at hand in the midst of it all.

On December 11, 2012, Kevin Peck, a police officer of West Valley City, Utah, was around the corner when a transit bus suddenly struck 24-year-old Aryann Smith in a crosswalk, pinning her underneath and severely crushing both of her legs. Peck said that when he arrived on the scene, all he could see was Smith's white shoe sticking out from under the bus. "I figured that there was probably a victim lying on the ground next to the bus or in front of the bus. And as I got a little bit closer, I could see a white tennis shoe underneath," he told the newspaper. Assessing the situation, he quickly discovered the woman had suffered severe injuries. And so he placed his body under the bus on the icy ground to take her pulse. After he took her hand, he held on and didn't let go until fire crews were able to lift the bus off her and pull her out. "She was very scared," he said. "I told her I would stay ..."<sup>1</sup>

Advent is a time that points to the story of God's coming into His broken creation ... *to stay*. Jesus, the Son of God, has come and laid himself down beneath the crushing weight of our sin and its consequences ... and He did not leave.

He stayed ... He stayed to pour his life into our death, He stayed to heal our mortal wounds, and He stayed to comfort our fears. He stayed so that sin and death might flee and creation could once again fully rejoice in His presence. He stayed in the "great waters" of our baptism, in anticipation of that great final Advent when, without interruption, we will walk with God in the garden once again.

*Therefore*, we need not live in fear. We are Immersed in Jesus. He is with us in our flesh, our fragility, and He fills us with His Spirit, and strength, and community ... immersed as one. We no longer live as if we are alone in the world. We live as if He who made the heavens and earth, who stills the wind and quiets the wave, is *with* us, eternally.

On the one hand we don't experience His presence the way the disciples did—in the stern of the ship or at hand at the breakfast table.

Yet He is still with us, indeed even in a greater way: the incarnate God calls us into communion with Him—flesh and blood, bread and wine, water and Word—and in this sacred communion we find the living Christ present in one another. Joined to His body, the church, through faith, we find the presence of God in a very real way. “Real presence” is a phrase often used to describe the Lord’s Supper, but it is also true to say this of the entire church.

In communion with one another, we are not alone but Christ touches us through the hands of our brothers and sisters. We do not live in recurrent forgetfulness of His presence only to be called back through some confrontation with the creation; instead, we are continually reminded that God is with us through His greatest creation: the church, the people of God, the body of Christ. Filled with His Spirit, held up with His strength, experienced in this community of faith that He has fashioned.

Together, we weather every storm, every hardship, and every trial with the hope that all creation will find its home here among His people. And in finding its home here, all of creation will find God at home here too. *“O let [us] thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders!”*

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.