

“In God’s Care- when we are least aware”

Jonah 2; Mark 1:12-20

We live under the love and protection and care of God.

In the words of the psalmist:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear...”

In the words of Jesus Christ:

“We are not to be afraid. We are more value than the sparrows that are remembered in God’s sight. Even the hairs on our head are numbered by God.”

We live in God’s care and we are called to share that care with others.

And yet...today’s lessons stretch our understanding of that care.

We hear the story of Jonah who was swallowed by a whale

And we hear the story of Jesus himself,

Right after his baptism being driven into the wilderness,

Where he was tempted by Satan and wild beasts.

Where was God when Jonah was swallowed by the whale?

Where was God when Jesus was driven into the wilderness?

The text says that when Jonah was thrown overboard for disobeying God’s command to “Go to Niniveh and preach” that “The Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah...”

The text says that “the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness...” where he was for forty days tempted by Satan.

Now, I am not saying that when bad things happen to good people

That God is always behind it.

There are times when tornados strike

and cancer or heart disease rears it’s ugly head

or a car accident happens.

I don’t believe that God is behind every calamity that happens to us

Just as God is not the author of every blessing that we receive.

And yet I do believe with all my heart and soul

That in all these instances that God is there-

Caring for us before even the first human shows up,

Speaking words of hope to us

before a human word can be uttered,

wrapping God’s arms around us so that

when human arms get there we can receive that care.

I believe in the God who created humans in God’s image out of love,

Who sent Jesus into the world that the world might be saved

And who promised to his disciples then and us now

That “he is with us to the end of the age”,

I believe in the triune God whose Spirit is with us today,

“to help us in our weakness when we do not know how to pray...

That Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”

I believe in the God who cares for us always

And I believe that even in these unlikely stories:

of Jonah being swallowed by the whale and Jesus temptation

we see evidences of God’s care for us

And God’s challenge to share God’s care with others.

Let’s look at the story of Jonah.

The story starts with no ambiguity- Jonah disobeys God.

God wants him to preach to Nineveh and he goes

In the opposite direction- he flees from God.

And yet God doesn’t give up on Jonah. A storm arises.

It becomes clear that Jonah is the source of the storm.

The sailors are afraid to do anything because

They are afraid of Jonah’s God-Yahweh.

They have more regard for Yahweh than Jonah

They cry out *“Please O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish*

On account of this man’s life.”

But they follow Jonah’s instruction and throw him overboard.

**The swallowing up by the big fish probably felt to Jonah
like the end of his life- that he had become fish food.**

We heard his prayer from the belly of the fish

And his resignation to God:

“Deliverance belongs to the LORD.”

But God is not done with Jonah. The fish spits him up

So that he can go to Nineveh and preach, miraculously

They hear God’s word through Jonah and obey,

They are indeed happy and Jonah is miserable.

You see Jonah didn’t want them to be saved.

They were the enemy and yet God cared for them as well.

Of course God could have done all his saving work

Without Jonah and it would have been easier.

But part of his saving work was his invitation to Jonah and

To you and me to not only receive God’s care in our lives

But to speak it & share that care in the most unlikely places

And be willing to be surprised at what God will do;

How broad God’s care is; and how God

Will change people’s lives including ours.

And then we get to the Jesus' temptation story.

Right after Jesus baptism,

right after Jesus participates with us in the rite of baptism,

right after the Spirit descends upon him as a dove,

that same Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness.

It seems like cruel and unusual punishment for Jesus

And yet Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, like Jesus baptism

Is Jesus living out the reality that God has indeed entered

Into our lives in Christ.

This is not the God who pretends to understand what is is

To be tempted by food, tempted by power and fame.

This is the God who in Christ knows temptation.

The writer of Hebrews puts it well:

"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tested as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus knows our temptations, he knows our sin, not so that we can ignore it but so that we can *"approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:16)

And the last part of today's temptation story is that *"the angels waited upon him."*

The word for “waited” in the Greek is the word *diakonon*.

It is the word that our term “deacon” comes from.

It means “to wait on table”; “to care for”; “to serve”.

It is a reminder that every time we serve another human being

That we are sharing God’s care and compassion

Even as the angels shared God’s care with Jesus.

Gary Chapman in his best seller “Five Love Languages”

Talks about the many ways we share love with each other:

- 1. Words of affirmation; 2. Quality time; 3. Receiving gifts;**
- 4. Acts of service; and 5. Physical touch.**

And so when the angels care for Jesus they are sharing God’s love.

And when Jesus calls the disciples-

Peter, Andrew, James and John- to follow him,

He is calls them to follow him is sharing

The compassion and care of God for the world.

And that call is extended to us as well:

To remember and recall the times in our lives

When God has cared for us in crisis.

To remember those times when we have been like the person in the Footsteps poem and God has carried us on his shoulders. And to share that care with another person in the name of Christ. Amen