

“Under the Mighty Hand of God”

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

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1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer.

One of the dirty little secrets of organized religion is the fact that we have dirty little secrets. People outside look in, and what do they see?

- More people are killed in the name of religion than by jealous husbands, drunk drivers, or liquor store robbers.
- They look at a Vatican stocked chuck-full of priceless treasures and celebrate priests, on the one hand, and see the sexual abuse and abject poverty, starvation, and homeless despair throughout the world, on the other.
- Our own General Conference, which just concluded it's gathering in Fort Worth, TX, spent a lot of time on issues of pension, budget, and health care for clergy but remains silent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, affordable health care for everyone, global warming, or the energy crisis into which we've blindly stumbled.
- We are seen preaching about love, but we don't want gays. We preach tolerance and diversity, but we still attempt to create separate ethnic congregations and conferences. Too many speak about forgiveness, but practice unrepented, intracongregational conflict.

I must admit, if I had not been raised in the church, I'd find little appeal, beyond the gospel of Jesus Christ, to draw me in to a community of faith.

So, what are we to do?

Citing our Epistle lesson for this morning, a Puritan preacher by the name of Ebenezer Erskine wrote these words in 1721 in a sermon titled "The Humble Soul the Particular Favourite of Heaven" ...

"Be much in eyeing those patterns of lowliness and humility ... God, angels, and saints, have cast you a copy of it. But especially be much in viewing the humility and humiliation of the Son of God, which is proposed as the great pattern."

For Erskine, Christian humility was not about personal humility, being a doormat for an uncaring, unconnected taskmaster. It is not self-deprecation or tearing down our own self-esteem. "It is," as my contemporary, Daniel Wallace from Dallas Theological Seminary writes, "the recognition that our worth is to be found in our Maker."

Our maker proposed the great pattern of humility through the passion of Jesus Christ. The only way to save the lives of all humanity was to give up his own. The only way to be faithful to the will of the Heavenly Father, was to submit his own will, which he did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It is quite obvious that too much of organized religion has become the big business that the Church loves to hate. We've replaced the Jewish authorities trading in the Temple with Christian Evangelicals trying to sway an election. Organized religion has allowed itself to become a substitute for the very same religious authorities that repelled Jesus and subjected the people to a harsh system of oppression, punishment, and despair.

It can be a terrifying thing to one day realize that we've grown up, and have become our father, or our mother.

It boils down to ego. Will we exert our own will, or subject ourselves to the will of God? Will we pattern our lives after the Lord, Jesus Christ, sharing in his sufferings, or we manipulate ourselves right to the top, leaving a wake of dead bodies behind us?

Ego and pride drove kings to send crusaders, to spill Moslem blood, and to retake the Holy Lands. Ego and pride is the engine of genocide. Ego and pride creates the delusional perception that it doesn't matter, I can do this on my own, I won't get caught, or I can buy my way out of any jam. John

Wesley correctly observes, in his notes on the 5th chapter of Peter, "Let every one be ready, upon all occasions, to give up his own will."

Humbling the self under the mighty hand of God is all about surrendering our will to the greater will of God. It implies trust. To move this metaphor a bit further, it means that the hand of God serves to protect and to nourish. It becomes the place where we pitch our tent, and allow the safety of His hand to draw community to gather and form. It means that we don't know the way, but are confident in the knowledge that Christ will show us the way, in every life circumstance. Living under the mighty hand of God means that we need not have any care or anxiety about what is planned for us next.

Yes, the Church is where the community of sinners all come together, and each of us attempt to exert our will, which makes us all look like a bunch of hypocrites to outsiders. But the Church is also the only community where we are admonished to serve a higher power, more lofty ideals, to give of everything of yourself, and in doing so, only then are you made complete.

Surrender the will. Hand it over to the will of Christ. Let him take the lead, and may we follow his pure and unblemished example.

The word of the Lord. Amen.