

Sermon 2010 Lent Midweek 5

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Theme: "How Could God Do That?"

"Aha! You would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:29-30). The words of those who passed by must have cut deeper every time. Crowds had once hung on every word he said, but now these onlookers had turned on him in the most vicious way.

And then, as if it couldn't get any worse, the criminals, crucified on either side, joined in the fun, mocking him as well. Here Jesus hung, suspended between heaven and earth, utterly alone. His followers had fled into the darkness the night before, and except for a handful including his mother, all the people seemed to have turned against him. He turned his eyes where he was certain to find some help.

Intensely he looked into the heavens, searching for a sign of deliverance from his God. But even the midday sky closed itself to him. The clouds were thick and the sun was nowhere to be found—all he saw was black nothingness. Desperately Jesus gazed into the abyss and cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). His cry echoed into the darkness—unreturned.

The earthquake in Haiti. The earthquake in Chili. The tsunamis around the world. The genocide in Darfur. The starvation in Ethiopia. On and on goes the suffering in this world and so often we are placed in the position, as Christians, of answering,

“How could a loving God let this happen?” From everyday struggles and frustrations to wars to terrorist attacks to natural disasters to broken families to lost jobs to tragic car accidents to long battles against disease. In these moments we come face to face with the utter depravity of the world. We cry out for help—to anyone—looking for answers. And we especially pray to God, time after time. But what do our cries get? Often, it seems as though our cries get the same thing Jesus got —silence.

How many Christians have prayed to be delivered from the clutches of some horrible situation to no avail? Sure one or two make it against the odds, but what about the rest? Does God truly hear us? Did he ignore the cries of the 230,000 people who were killed in Haiti’s earthquake?

As the dark clouds swirled over his head, Jesus faced his greatest trial—everything hung in the balance. In a matter of hours he would be dead. He had been shamed, humiliated, and discredited. Everyone around Jesus had reason to abandon faith because the pressure to despair was

immense. They watched death reach out to embrace Jesus? How could this be the arrival of God's kingdom that he had so forcefully preached?

Everyone abandoned him, but stubbornly, defiantly, Jesus pressed onward. He did the unthinkable. In the face of unspeakable pain and utter abandonment, He refused to give up. He did not fight to bring himself down from that cross. He did not call on his legions of angels to intervene. He did not curse God. Foolishly, mockers would say, Jesus threw himself into the hands of his Father. Foolishly, scoffers would ridicule, Jesus continued to bless and love those who stood against him. Following the way of love, he persisted till the end and refused to back down. He would not be deterred; he threw himself headlong into the destructive path of death itself.

In this world death also stands on our doorsteps threatening to tear our lives apart. Will you continue to look to God in hope, in certainty of strength for this life and a better life to come or will you walk away in despair? Alone, you will eventually fall into despair, but with others, with the family of God, there is hope and joy.

Peter's letter was written to Christians facing persecution, people tempted to give up on God. He encourages us to band together to face all kinds of trouble knowing that like a lion spots wildebeests who have

wandered away from the herd one by one so too does Satan look for us when we are walking alone.

In a world where the strong conquer, Jesus had been weak. In a world where wisdom ruled, he had been a fool. On Good Friday, this dark, broken and unforgiving world once again asserted its strength. But as it pressed down relentlessly on this weak and seemingly foolish Jesus, its iron grip began to slip. On Sunday morning, the way of the world was proven fraudulent!

The world that everyone thought they knew was completely turned on its head. Jesus, this crucified failure, was bodily raised to life! His foolishness was proved to be true wisdom—his weakness, true strength! Everything the world thought it had figured out began to crumble in a pile of rubble. The insignificant and humble ways of faith, hope, and love were shown in him to be God's way. The dark world around us continues to mock our foolish hope but our assurance is found in that empty tomb.

Earthquakes, disease and disaster; how could a loving God let that happen? How could a loving God allow his one and only son to die alone, forsaken on a cross? He did it because he had to do it if he wanted us to live through the brokenness of this world. To pay for our sin was the only way to insure our immortality. How dare anyone judge our God over the

sickness and tragedy that Satan has loosed upon his world? It is God who rescued us from this disaster. We are now in a lifeboat awaiting our turn to be brought home.

People who judge God for the brokenness in this world remind me of the story of a very wealthy grandmother who took her little grandson to the seashore. She had just bought him a brand new summer outfit. He was walking by the shore when a rogue wave came in, grabbed him and swept him out to sea. The grandmother fell on her knees and prayed, "Oh God, take everything from me, take my own life, but don't take my grandson." At that moment a wave swept in and deposited her grandson at her feet alive and well. The grandmother looked to the heavens and said, "He had a hat." Amen.