

March 22, 2020

Isaiah 12:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:11-32

# “Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With . . . When Life Wears”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Drowning victims, especially adults, are extremely dangerous. There are many terrible examples of a person coming to the rescue of a drowning victim only to end up drowning themselves. Someone who is panicking will instinctively hold on to anything and use it to push themselves up. Swimming to someone who's drowning and trying to take hold of them is dangerous even for professionals who are wearing one of those orange or red floating devices. Most agree that when you have nothing readily available to safely use in order to save a drowning victim, such as a pole or some sort of a floating device, you are left with no other choice other than to keep a safe distance and allow the one who is drowning to eventually wear themselves out. The lifesaver doesn't want to have to do that, and the one who is being left to thrash about will most likely be horribly confused.

There are times in our lives where the Lord God allows us to thrash about. There are times when the Lord God must keep his distance and wear us out. We plunge into the dangerous waters thinking that all is going to be well, only to discover that the waters are not good and safe as we convinced ourselves to believe. Because of the hardness of our hearts we dismiss the danger. We are not ready for rescue until we really see the truth and have worn ourselves out.

In our Gospel lesson for this morning, we have a great example of this. A certain man had two sons. And one day, the younger of these sons said to his father, "Give me my share of the estate now." So the father divided his wealth between the two sons. And a few days later, this younger son set out for a distant land, and there he squandered all that he had on riotous living. Now, not long after this, a great famine swept over the land, and the boy began to starve. He persuaded a man to hire him to feed his pigs, but he was so hungry that even the slop that he was feeding the swine began to look good to him. And still, nobody gave him anything. Finally, the boy came to his senses. He said to himself, "At home even my father's servants have enough food and to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will go home and ask my father to hire me as one of his servants."

The younger son had to thrash about. He had to be worn out. With that, our theme: **Calvary's Climb Confronts Us With ... When Life Wears**. And there are a lot of things in life that wear us down. Filled with ups and downs, highs and lows, you never know what to expect. Here we are in the middle of the corona-virus and a major disruption. Could it be a small part of a wearing us down? I mean there are a lot of things that have been wearing down this country for some time. Still, the college kids are partying it up right now during spring break. Just read an AP article this week titled, *American Attitudes Make Virus Response a Hard Sell*, where the writer quotes an author from Lehigh University: "In America, we don't do subtle and subdued." Wow, isn't that the truth on so many different levels?

Whatever you call the stuff that wears us down, be it a virus, an opioid epidemic, opposing points of view, politics, economic strife, an earthquake in Salt Lake City this last week, family stress, false teachers in the church, life has a way of kicking us. Wait a minute! That might be a candy-coated way of saying it. To say that it's only "life" kicking us might give the impression that it has nothing to do with our relationship with the Lord God. A lot of that is missing in our thinking, as usual. Where does the Lord

God fit into all of this? In America, we don't do subtle and subdued. We can be very arrogant. Make no mistake about it, the Lord God can knock the wind right out of our sails and bring us to our knees by what he allows and sends. Whether anyone will acknowledge that reality or not, is an entirely different matter.

The troubles that we experience are not to be understood as a result of the Lord God, but are connected to our rebellion against his principled and real love. As we continue to exist in a fallen world, the direct and indirect consequences of humanity's rebellion against the Lord God are repeatedly felt in a wide variety of ways. Increase rebellion in the world and increased rebellion in the church produce heavy rains that shower down a flood of problems that cause us to thrash about. But those who are drowning in a sea of sin and death, often fight hard to keep what they have, and hope to avoid being subdued. But only when we lift up our eyes to the hills and acknowledge that our help comes only in the name of the Lord are we then ready for rescue.

When we keep silent, when we cover up our iniquity, our bones waste away through groaning all day long as God's hand is heavy upon us. Our strength dries up. May we then acknowledge our sin and confess our transgressions to the Lord, and he will forgive the iniquity of our sin. The words of our appointed Old Testament lesson for this morning speak volumes to this reality. Just listen to what Isaiah has to say. He writes (Is. 12:1-2): "You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.'"

Did you catch those words? Again, "You were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me." This is the way that the Lord God must work in the state in which we live. Like those who are drowning, he must often let us thrash about in the water until we wear ourselves out, or come to our senses, as the prodigal son had to in our Gospel lesson. We must come to that moment when we are also sick of eating with the pigs, like the prodigal son became sick of the slop, only to become sick for the rescue saying, "At home even my father's servants have enough food and to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will go home and ask my father to hire me as one of his servants."

And so, he set off. Now, he was still some distance from his home when his father saw him coming. And he was so filled with compassion that he ran towards his son and embraced him and kissed him. The boy said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I am not worthy to be called your son." But, his father called for the servants and said, "Bring me the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Put rings on his fingers and shoes on his feet. Kill the fatted calf. We must celebrate with a feast. My son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

The father in the parable is to be understood as the Lord God. He gives the share to the younger son, allows him to wallow with the pigs, but is ready to embrace and kiss in reconciliation. On the way to his father, the prodigal son reasons to himself about what he will say and what he will do when he gets there. His best laid out plans crumble as the father runs to him and commands for the finest robe, rings and shoes, and a feast of celebration. This is truly and amazing and comforting reconciliation. The heart of the father

is incredibly full of mercy and grace. So also is the heart of our Father in heaven, and his heart is found in his Word, his Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. As the apostle Paul says in our epistle lesson (2 Cor. 5:18-19, 20): “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation ... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

So, what do we learn when **Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With ... When Life Wears**? We learn that because we are sinful creatures, the Lord God must work in mysterious ways. Wouldn’t it be strange to watch a lifeguard without any resources to stand there and watch a person thrash about in the water without doing anything, at least at first? Please pay close attention to the words that most don’t want to hear. They describe exactly what is necessary because we “don’t do subtle and subdued.”

In the Old Testament it is written (Job 4:17-18): “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.” And, in the words of Paul in the New Testament: “... the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).” Finally, these words from the book of Hebrews (12:5-6): “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’”

Indeed! The Lord must continually wear us out for rescue. That is what **Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With** on this Fourth Sunday in Lent. May we then say with the Psalmist in the Psalm appointed for this day: “Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott