

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

Genesis 9:8-17

Ephesians 3:14-21

Mark 6:45-56

God has a plan. We say it all the time because it's true. Jesus rising from the dead was the plan all along. It didn't seem so great on Good Friday. Good Friday was a nightmare of a day for the disciples yet it was indeed God's plan. Here are three bible passages that we take solace from regularly: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11). "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). God has a plan and He is working it out; meticulously, lovingly, masterfully working it out. Faith sees it, faith trusts it, faith celebrates it; God has a plan. So much has already been accomplished. Prophesied and accomplished; God's plan is all encompassing and it is supremely good.

Man's defiance is not God's plan. Man's hardness of heart is not God's plan. God accounts for it. God accommodates for it within His plan. God anticipates it and has divine preemptive measures for man's defiance and hardness of heart, but it is not His plan. In this life, God has given humanity the ability to defy Him, to spit on truth, to desecrate what is holy. Eve had the ability to defy God. That *ability* was part of His plan. Eve defying God was not God's plan – that was all Eve. God is not the author of evil. God does not instigate sin. Christians are called upon to hold onto two ideas simultaneously: Firstly, there is evil in the world which is a genuine threat to what is good and, secondly, God is actively executing His plan which always has been and always will be greater than the dark forces at work around us. "If God is for us, who could be against us?" (Romans 8:31). "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

It beggars belief, but the folks in charge of the Opening Ceremonies for the Olympic Games in Paris decided it was a good idea to blaspheme the Last Supper. Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, *The Last Supper*, was reprised with an overlarge lady as Jesus and drag queens as the disciples. A child was in the midst. Then Dionysus, or Bacchus if you prefer Roman names to Greek ones, was planted in the scene. Dionysus/Bacchus is the god of wine and revelry and dissipation. This episode was vulgar, profane, and shameful – in vivid Technicolor, brought to you by NBC. It's sad. It's demonic but unsurprising. Understandably, Christians are caterwauling. It's time to be strong. It's time to be wise. It's time to be discerning. Our response is not to hate. Our response is not to engage in pearl-clutching. Our response is to look to God's Word. Our response is to examine ourselves, to repent, to reposition ourselves on the Rock, to embrace Christ, to embrace forgiveness, and to steel ourselves for what lies ahead.

It was the fourth watch of the night. For hours the disciples had struggled with the sea. Jesus is not with them. The Lord Christ had stayed behind to linger with the crowd, to pray in solitude. Jesus sees them. Jesus sees that they were "making headway painfully, for the wind was against them" (Mark 6:48). That night 2000 years ago was divinely constructed to tell you something

about your life today. God has a plan. Some of you know what it is to be making headway painfully, for the wind is against you. Sin haunts our steps – our own and the sin of those around us. Sickness, loss, and grief of all varieties cause us to make headway painfully. And the will to continue is strained. Courage wanes. We feel puny, ill-equipped, outmatched. Fear was in the disciples' hearts before they saw the Lord. Did Noah fear the storm? With God's promises all around him, with God's plan unfolding, when Noah was in the ark, did he fear the storm? It's no coincidence; Noah in the ark, the disciples in that boat and us in this church; it's no coincidence. They are all of a piece.

There's a hymn that we sing on "All Saints' Day." It's titled "For All the Saints." Here's the fifth stanza: "And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!" The distant triumph song. When Jesus approached the disciples they were in a panic, terrified. Christ's voice pierces the predawn air: "Take heart; I AM. Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). That's the plan. God of God and Light of Light trampled the waves of the sea (Job 9:8). The great I AM is with us. His voice, His death and resurrection is the distant triumph song. I am with you always (Matthew 28:20). Jesus announced His presence using God's proper name – I AM! Even though they were making headway painfully, God was with them. That's the plan. He got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. That's the plan. He who rules the universe has humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant. That's the plan. This omnipotent Messiah identifies with us, gives His life for us, and dwells among us. That's the plan. His kingdom comes with His blood, His crucifixion. He conquers death by dying. He gives you His life as a free gift of His grace. That's the plan.

We've had three aged women die within the span a few days. Two were in their mid 90's. One was 106. Was their warfare long? Did they encounter difficulty, loss, pain, loneliness, trepidation? What was the song of salvation that animated their hearts? Did the world change precipitously on their watch? Take heart; I AM. Do not be afraid. Has the Word of God ever calmed your fears? And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song. And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia! I would suggest to you that Noah was not afraid. In the ark, Noah sailed in trust. A long storm; a heavy storm; judgment and death was the plan; it fell all around him but Noah was nestled safely in the ark. A rainbow is glorious. An empty tomb is better. Picture the water that covered the earth. A flood of righteous judgment against man's wickedness covered the earth. Now look at Jesus on the cross. All of God's wrath against sin was poured out on Him. My sin, my grievous sin, my selfishness, greed, lust and pride; your haughty spirit, your indulgent gluttony, your unforgiving heart – that's what Jesus died bearing. God the Father floods His Son with the penalty of our sin. The pure and holy Son of God suffered in our place. That's the plan. Jesus paid the price. Forgiveness, full and free, is His gift. That's the plan.

Take heart; I AM. Do not be afraid. Jesus got in their boat and the wind ceased. St. Mark then provides a warning word for you and me. "And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:51-52). It wasn't God's plan for the disciples not to understand about the loaves. It wasn't God's plan for their hearts to be hardened. Jesus had just fed 5000 men with five loaves and two fish. The disciples were witnesses to Christ's divine authority and they failed to grasp what was playing out right in front

of them. They did not understand about the loaves. I AM was feeding the multitudes with miraculous food and the disciples' hearts were hardened. This Divine Service is a recapitulation of those events. God is with us. In the ark of His church the loaves of His body are broken for you to eat. Take heart; I AM. Do not be afraid. That's the plan.

We may be making headway painfully, but the Lord of heaven and earth is with us and His plan, His truth is marching on. The people who mocked the Lord's Supper in Paris for billions to see don't understand about the loaves and their hearts are hard. They don't understand Him who is the bread of life (John 6:35). They don't understand that He came to deliver them from their sin, deliver them from their grave, deliver them from judgment and hell and separation from God. The Love of God is the plan. He's given it to us. We give to others. That's the plan. Mary Burns, Pat Krahn, and Ruth Schoff were in this ark with us and they have made it to the other side. The Lord Christ served them in this place. That's the plan. Strong in life; they are stronger in death. Here's the sixth stanza of that hymn: "The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest; Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!" That's the plan.