

*Sermon for Proper 7, Year B  
by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson  
Holy Nativity, Plano  
21 June, 2009*

In our Old Testament reading, God poses certain questions to Job. These questions inevitably bring the honest reader to his knees. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Even a great man like Job is a very small creature compared with the eternal, almighty creator of all things. And I am not nearly as great a man as Job.

The fact is that we all fall into the same error that Job did at one time or another. We forget, sometimes willfully, that we are creatures and not the creator. We respond to suffering by grasping at control, by shoving God out of the center of our lives, by denying him as the creator, by trying to be our own arbiters of reality. After God speaks to him out of the whirlwind, Job shuts his mouth. He knows that he cannot answer God's questions. That is the course of wisdom. But most of us shout back, shaking our fist; or worse yet, turn our backs and pretend that God hasn't spoken at all.

We all have suffering. We all have anxieties. We all have storms in our lives. But the answer to our suffering is not to reject the creator. The answer to suffering is to allow the creator to create us anew. It is not his fault that we bring sin and suffering upon ourselves and one another. But he will fix it, in his own way and in his own time, if we allow him.

St. Paul encourages the Corinthians by saying, "The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." We no longer live for ourselves. We live for him who died for us and was raised again. We have died with Christ, so we are no longer in control! Praise the Lord! The upshot of it all is that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." As we live for Christ, as we are controlled by the love of Christ and the Spirit of Christ, we are created anew to be what God intended us to be. We are not bound to carry out the same old petty, hateful, self-indulgent patterns of our lives. We are controlled by the love of Christ. We are new creations. If we are "in Christ".

And now God speaks to the world through us, his new creations. We are his ambassadors. Just as we have received new life in Christ, because he did not hold our sins against us, we are to offer the love of Christ to others, not holding their sins against them, so that they too can allow themselves to be controlled by it and become new creations.

The service that we are to render to God and to the world is to spread this message of reconciliation, drawing people back to God, who wants to recreate them. We are sent with the message of God's goodness, just as the Gerasene man delivered from the legion of demons was sent back to tell people what God had done for him.

How often we fail even at this simple task. We don't fail because we aren't sufficiently trained. We fail because we don't want God to mess up the nice petty little lives that we have designed for ourselves. St. Paul says, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Because there is no way you can be ambassadors for Christ until you are.

The man delivered from the legion had a message, but not much of it was in words. Mostly, the message was himself. He was changed. He was sane. He was whole. After that the rest of the message is easy. Who did this for you?! Jesus did it. Our message must be the same one. We must be changed, and sane, and whole. And then we can say, "Jesus did it." But before we can say that, we have to let him do it. Our trouble is that we cease to identify with the man who was delivered. Instead, we identify with the people who were afraid. And we beg Jesus to leave, so that no more of our swine will be destroyed.

We don't really want to deal with a God who responds to our complaints out of a whirlwind. We don't really want to deal with a savior who rearranges our tidy little economic situation. We don't really want to be reconciled to God, or to be controlled by his love, or to be ambassadors of his reconciliation. And we often band together to assure each other that none of those things are required of us. We can have church, and it won't require us to say anything, or do anything, or be anything that we don't already desire.

And after we have done that long enough, we will always find ourselves in a small boat on big water with a great storm bearing down upon us. And because of our inattention and rejection of him, the Master seems to be asleep, even though the water is already filling the boat. We are afraid, because the storm might take away the life that we have so carefully crafted for ourselves, and so we cry out to the Lord, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"

Whatever the storm is in your life, whatever the terror that pursues you and threatens to destroy what you think is your self, there is no doubt that Jesus Christ can tame it with a word. “Peace. Be still.” He is the only one who can answer the questions put to Job. He *was* there when the cornerstone of the earth was laid, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”. He *has* entered into the springs of the sea, and walked in the recesses of the deep. The gates of death *have* been revealed to him. The demons obey him. Even the wind and the waves obey him. He can calm your storm.

But whether he does or not, his question stands: “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Have you put your whole trust in the grace and love of Jesus Christ? Because, if you have, then a storm is just a storm, whether it kills you or not. And God will be just as good at the bottom of the sea as presiding over the sudden calm.

The only reason for us to be afraid of the storm is that we are not reconciled to God and not controlled by the love of Christ. But “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away”. So let it go. Trust God, and live for him rather than for yourself. For in the end, all the storms will be calmed. And all the sons of God will shout for joy once again, in peace in the presence of God.