

Hom Birth of John the Baptist 2018

This weekend at mass we are celebrating the birth of John the Baptist.

We hear a great deal of John the Baptist around Advent, the weeks before Christmas. John was the prophet sent to prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus. All of our bible readings today have something to say about John and I as the preacher today I am charged with offering you a message based on those readings.

Given that we are celebrating the Birth of John the Baptist the first thing I did was go to God in prayer and ask him: "God what do you want me to talk about this weekend? What message do your people need to hear? Father in heaven, help me to deliver your message to your people."

The first thing that occurred to me after my prayer was that John the Baptist's job was very simple---He pointed everyone to Christ. It was God who spoke as John baptized Jesus and said: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." You are my Son, Jesus. From that point on John would decrease. Jesus would increase. John knew that if people found Christ then Christ, Himself, would be the answer to all their questions. Christ could respond to all their needs. Christ would save them from every storm?

'The founder of the Methodist church was man by the name of John Wesley. John Wesley was an incredible man of faith who was absolutely tireless in serving the Lord. When John Wesley was coming to America he found himself literally in the middle of a storm at sea. I wonder if you have ever been on or at the ocean during a storm? It can be frightening. As huge dark waves rocked the boat Wesley was frightened out his mind. He frantically ran around the ship seeking shelter. In the process, he came across a group of Moravians who were singing and calmly praying. No fear. No panic. Not even among the children. Wesley could not believe this and he asked the source of their strength. They replied: 'We have Jesus as our Savior.' It wasn't as if John Wesley did not know Jesus because he most certainly did, but, sometimes we need to be reminded to take our eyes off the storm and put them on Jesus. This is what John Wesley did. He took his eyes off the storm and put them on Jesus. Sermons.com John Wesley was still on a ship in the middle of a storm. The waves were still washing over the sides of the boat. Nothing had changed. The Moravians pointed him to Christ. Christ gave Wesley the peace he needed. Christ calmed his fear.

Corrie Ten Boom once said: "Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its troubles, it empties today of its strength."

Think about your personal experience this past week. Have you found yourself upset or preoccupied or worried about something? Have you found yourself being negative, focusing on a problem or something bad which is happening in the world or in your family? May I make a suggestion? You are not alone on the boat. Christ is with you in the middle of the storm. Last I heard Christ is still God. Christ has power and Christ has the plan for your life. Let me point you in his direction. Go over to him. Speak. He will listen.

Dolly Parton said that "Storms make trees take deeper roots." If trouble never occurred would anyone ever turn to God. Set your roots deep into the living water.

There was a woman in a church community who was well known for her simple faith and great calm in the midst of many trials. Another woman who had never met her but had heard of her came to visit one day. "I must find out the secret of her calm, happy life," she thought to herself. As she met her she said: "So you are the woman with the great faith I've heard so much about." "NO," came the reply. "I am not the woman with the great faith, but I am the woman with the little faith in the great God." Do you see what the woman was doing? She pointed to Christ and away from herself. We have a great God.

I am sure you remember the story of Jesus asleep on a boat during a terrible storm where the apostles thought they were going to drown. Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith in his ability to calm the storm. Jesus was disappointed that they do not yet understand who he is. If they understood who he was then their eyes would have been on him instead of the storm. The message once again is to keep our focus on Jesus.

Jesus. Knowing who is he is what brings the calm.

“William Cowper was one of the most popular poets in 18th century England. He went through a time in his life when despair over his life was so great that he tried to end it all. He swallowed enough poison that should have killed him, but it didn't. He then went to the Thames River, intending to hurl himself over the bridge. But something 'strangely restrained' him. The next morning he fell on a sharp knife---and broke the blade. One again he survived. Failing in these attempts at suicide he tried to hang himself, but someone found him, took him down, found that he was just unconscious, and revived him. Later he picked up a Bible and began to read the Book of Romans. It was then that Cowper finally met the God who calms storms, including the storms in his own life. It is obvious that Cowper wrote from these experiences when he penned these memorable words: 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.'“ King Duncan author of sermon on Sermons.com quoting from Henry Garipy, Portraits of Perseverance (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989).

Cowper was so overwhelmed by his problems that at one point he wanted to end it all. His focus was on the darkness. Turning to the word of God in Scripture helped him to find Christ sleeping in the corner of the boat. Christ awakened in Cowper a desire to live. Christ gave him hope and purpose and Cowper went on to set the world on fire with his poetry.

I think we all need to continually remind ourselves that we are not alone in the boat. NO matter what comes our way, no matter the nature of the storm there is a God and His Name is Jesus. We are each folded into the palm of his hand. Here look at the palm of my hand. Doesn't it look like a boat? Right across the palm of God's hand that is where you are stretched out. God has you covered.

John the Baptist was sent to point the people to Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God. He has the words that give life.

Right now I am pointing you to Christ. So let me repeat the questions I asked a moment ago.

Think about your personal experience this past week. Have you found yourself upset or preoccupied or worried about something? Have you found yourself being negative, focusing on a problem or something bad which is happening in the world or in your family?

Then imagine yourself in a small row boat with Jesus. You don't have to think of words to say. You don't need to explain the issue which brought you there. Just sit down in the boat and stay with Jesus. If you get bored sitting down find a place and lie down. Just be with Jesus. And don't worry. He promised not to leave you alone.

Most of this sermon is taken in “pieces” from two sermons by King Duncan on Sermons.com for the weekend June 24, 2018. I reframed the stories to fit with my message.