Sermon September 3, 2017

Matt. 16:21-27

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“For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

I’ve been reading off and on a book by Rowan Williams called “Tokens of Trust: Introduction to Christian Belief.”

Now I say I read it off and on because I find every chapter gives me so much to think about that it’s hard to comprehend it all. He writes about things like, “What does it mean to believe in God?” and “Can God possibly be almighty in the midst of so much evil and disaster?” He addresses really big topics that stretch one’s thinking. Yet he writes in such a way that it’s relatively easy to follow his arguments.

What struck me in reading his book this week was the chapter entitled, “The Risk of Love.” In it Rowan Williams writes, “But part of the integrity, the interconnectedness, of the world is that its processes have brought life and intelligence into being.”

The integrity of God’s creation depends on allowing natural processes to occur in the world; for these are the same processes that brought about life. And yet, at the same time, these same processes bring about natural disasters, “violent moments when the interactions are explosive.”

When people ask why does God allow these events to happen? Rowan responds with these questions: “Would a world with a perpetual safety net really be a world at all, a place with integrity? And is it possible to, imagine a world where certain processes were always halted in their tracks by God if there were a risk to living creatures?” Would it really be the world God intended?

The beauty of God’s creation is found in no only its reflection of all that is wonderful and good about God. The beauty of God’s creation also lies in the fact that God put all of Himself into creating our world. Our world and all that is in it is the perfect image of God. He did not hold back on anything.

So our world is wild, we are wild, and constantly exposed to the processes of nature.

“Does this mean that God makes a risky world?”, Rowan asks. The answer is a resounding “Yes!”

But here’s the thing, following Rowan’s train of thought, the world is risky only as we see it. From our vantage point it seems like chaos reigns at times, but not from God’s perspective. From God’s perspective it’s all part the ongoing process of creation.

And because we only have a small window from which to see the world around us, we are limited in understanding, in seeing the full picture, and so we must depend on God.

Take note, though, it’s not a dependence where we are incapable of action. On the contrary, it’s the type of dependence from which we are called to act. Our dependence on God’s mercy and love is what gives us the courage to face our fears and act on behalf others.

This is what we’ve been watching in the news this week. Strangers helping each other, risking their lives in order to save lives.

Dependence on God’s mercy and love enabled men and women (the first responders) go into the flood zones and perform miraculous feats of bravery. We saw those moments time and time again this week.

We’re they trained? Yes. Were they scared? I believe many were frightened. Was there an easier way to go into the flooded streets and save the lives of people stranded in their homes? No, there wasn’t.

Was Jesus tempted to find a better way to bring about God’s plan for our salvation? I believe he was. That is why he lashed out so strongly at Peter, “Get behind me Satan.” But Jesus did not allow his fear to get in the way of following the course God created for him. That was the cross he had do bear - total dependence on God.

Did the rescuers in Houston have to deny their fears? Yes. That was the cross they had to bear – they had to face their fears and resist the temptation to wait and see if there were better ways to rescue those who were stranded in their homes. They had to depend on God.

May we learn from their example. May we too go through life with an awareness of God’s abiding presence. May we come to understand the power God bestows upon us when we accept our total dependence upon His grace and mercy.

What we saw last week in Houston are role models of faith and trust. We owe them our deepest gratitude and respect.

And for every man, woman, and child who were forced to face this natural disaster, we pray:

God of all creation, give your faithful children courage in the days, weeks, and months ahead to not lose hope in your ever-abiding love. Protect them from all anxiety and bring to them a sense of peace. In the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Excerpts from *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief.*

Rowan Williams, Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.