

Tomorrow Morning

Psalm 113

A sermon for chapel at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, February 15, 2002

There are various schemes, various patterns, which have been suggested for the preparation of sermons. Among the clergy of our church, Dr. Richard Caemmerer's "goal, malady, and means" is most common. As a student who had Dr. Caemmerer, I struggled with "means." Means? As a student I thought, "Means of Grace, Gospel and Sacraments. Go to communion. Remember your baptism. What more than that do you need to say?" These are still standard sentences in student sermons. Those sentiments are true, of course, but in the 30 years since having Dr. Caemmerer experience has taught me to better appreciate what he was driving at. Means, I believe, should not be lofty but lowly, not ethereal but incarnate, not pious platitudes but present help. Means should be small things, simple things, daily things through which the believing hearer can appropriate the power of the Gospel.

So what's the means for this sermon? Tomorrow morning. Of if not tomorrow morning, Sunday morning or Monday morning or Tuesday morning or any morning when you wake up and think, "Hey, I don't have to do anything today! There are things I could do and I might do but I don't have to. No class I have to go to; no paper I have to write; no sermon I have to deliver. Don't have to shave, don't have to shower. I'm free!" It doesn't happen often but isn't it a great feeling when it does? It is a mercy from God, a specific kindness that He will give to you His baptized child tomorrow morning or whenever you have a free morning. It's not one of the big major league mercies, like forgiveness but a little thing, a simple thing. It's a little mercy that you'll want to remember when, as Ecclesiastes says, "the days of trouble come...when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (12:1). It's a little mercy you'll want to remember when you'll cry out, as the Psalmist does, "How long, O Lord?" (13:1).

Kathleen Norris is an insightful Christian writer. In her 1998 book Amazing Grace she tells about a friend who had been raised in North Dakota. As a young man he had gone west to work in the oil fields during the boom years of the 70's and 80's. "He was," she writes, "fearless, one of those death-defying people who actually liked the roughest, meanest, most dangerous jobs on a rig. He'd made a bunch of money, and had drunk through much of it. Most days, to get through the shift on the oilrig, he would take a little speed. The cheap stuff, known as crank" (p. 18).

Eventually he got involved in drug networking. "He said that he had thought things were working out fine. He and the guy he was in business with were making good contacts, setting up a network, and he felt lucky to have fallen in with someone with so much experience. Then, one day, as they were driving on the outskirts of the small city that was to be the base of their operations, his friend veered, suddenly, onto the shoulder of the road. He had seen an acquaintance driving past in the other direction and was

debating whether to turn his car around and follow him. ‘I need to kill him,’ he said matter-of-factly, reaching for a gun that our friend had not known was stashed under the front seat. ‘I need to kill him, but he’s with someone, and I don’t know ho. So it’ll have to wait.’

“‘It was right then I decided to get out,’ he said, ‘This was over my head.’ And that is salvation, or at least the beginning of it.” (p. 19f)

Wait a minute, I thought. He doesn’t know Jesus, the only name under heaven by which we are saved. He probably doesn’t understand the nature of sin. He’s just trying to save his own neck. What do you mean, “And that is salvation, or at least the beginning of it?”

She goes on: “I was glad to learn from The Oxford Companion to the Bible that ‘the primary meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words translated ‘salvation’ is non-religious.’” I checked it out and what she writes seems to be true.

“It seems right to me that in so many instances in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the gospels salvation is described in physical terms, in terms of the here and now, because I believe that this is how most of us first experience it. Only later do the more spiritual implications of salvation begin to make themselves known.”

We hope and pray that this drug dealer’s friendship with Kathleen Norris provided a way for him to gain a true understanding of sin and of his only Savior. We hope that realizing he was in over his head led him to look to Jesus not only for temporal but also eternal help.

This drug dealer went through a compressed but very intense “How long” experience. Things were looking bad. He was in over his head. He was looking for a way out. You and I go through those times too. We go through times when we feel like we’re in over our heads. We go through times when we’re looking for a way out. We all get so stuck in such tough times that we become convinced, as Lou Holtz said, that the light at the end of the tunnel is a train rushing at you. But here’s the difference between you and the drug dealer. In over his head, he could have cried out, “How long?” In over your head, you cry out, “How long, O Lord.” It will be a prayer, not a cry of desperation. The remembrance of mercies big and small that you have received in the past, like tomorrow morning, will get you through the inevitable tough times when you think God has forgotten you.

How blessed you are that by baptism, from your home congregation, from Christian friends, from this seminary, you have learned the spiritual implications of the little deliverances in life. You have been learning since your Baptism to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. You have been learning to live and move and have your being in the God who saves you. “Every morning mercies new” have come to you. Of course, not that we’re perfected in this life of sanctification. That is why the “how long, O Lord” times are seen in retrospect to be such great blessings. In

those “how long, O Lord, times you have to “suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9).

So when you find yourself with the psalmist in one of those “How long, O Lord” times, draw on the remembrance of His past mercies. As he says, “But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation” (13:5). One of those mercies, admittedly small in the eternal scheme of things, but a mercy nonetheless will be waking up tomorrow or whatever day with nothing to do. It will be a reminder that there is relief from work, there are times of salvation when you feel that you’re in over your head, there are times after hard toil and labor that you experience the Gospel promise, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Dr. Caemmerer wrote, “As long as the Christian lives in the world, he is continually oppressed by the forces of godlessness around him and within him. His flesh still wages war against the Spirit-filled nature. Preaching aims to aid the Christian man in this battle and to help him day by day be a better servant of God in Christ. He engages in this battle down to his dying moment. This means that he must be helped to endure in faith and life, to grow in patience and in the power to sustain burdens and conquer trials. The preacher aims to strengthen the Christian in this conflict, to keep him steadfast and watchful until the heavenly Father takes him home, and to give him courage and hope....” (Preaching for the Church, p. 18). Let tomorrow morning be a little mercy, a means toward that eternal goal. Have a good break! Amen.