

"Jesus' Authority Is For the Good of Creation"

Text: Matthew 8:23-27

2/3/2019

Last Sunday we said that, in Epiphany, Jesus is revealed as One Who has authority, and that He uses His authority to reign as King over God's people. We said last week that Jesus uses His authority for good. This Sunday, since we remain in the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel - chapter 8, we stick with last Sunday's theme of authority, and we see from Matthew's story of Jesus' calming of a storm on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus' authority was, and still is, for the good of creation. Let's look at that now together ...

As we do, we return to today's Gospel, where we are told by the evangelist Matthew that:

"When Jesus got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but He (i.e., Jesus) was asleep.
"(vs.23-24)

Matthew goes on to write that, after the disciples roused Jesus from sleep, He:

" ... rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm."(v.26)

The disciples, understandably, were astonished. They even asked themselves:

"What sort of Man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?"(v.27)

The answer to their question was this: He's God; as Matthew writes in the very first chapter of his Gospel - Jesus is Emmanuel: God with us (1 :23).

In ancient Near Eastern literature (the literature of the Gospel of Matthew), sleep was sometimes a symbol of divine rule. How significant it is then that in today's Gospel reading from Matthew 8, Jesus, with the forces of nature breaking loose all around Him, demonstrates His rule over creation by sleeping in the back of a boat on a stormy sea. The Psalms speak of God's power over nature, specifically the sea, saying:

"Mightier than the waves of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty!"(93 :4)

and also:

"You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them."(89:9)

In today's Gospel, Jesus, upon waking, rebukes a storm and stills the sea. In narrating that to us, Matthew shows clearly that Jesus is the God of the Psalms; He is the Lord of creation.

Jesus has all authority- "in heaven and on earth," as He will say at the very end of Matthew's Gospel - and as we saw last week, Jesus uses His authority to save. What we see this week is that Jesus uses authority to save not just people, but all that God has created. Jesus' authority is for good, the good of creation.

That's a good thing, because creation is still breaking loose all around us. Hurricanes and tornadoes; Fires, mud slides, rising flood waters; earthquakes; below zero temperatures, that make it feel like you're in Alaska instead of Indiana. These are all manifestations of creation being thrown into chaos as a result of mankind's fallenness into sin. As Paul writes in today's Epistle:

" ... the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him Who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."(Romans 8:20-21)

Paul is talking there about mankind's fall into sin, and the effect of that on creation.

When you go back and read about that in Genesis 3, you see that, when Adam and Eve sinned, they drug all of creation down into a curse. God even said to Adam:

" ... cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; ... by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, 'til you return to the ground, ... "(3: 17-19)

Again, in the words of Paul:

" ... the creation was subjected to futility ... "

BUT God also made a promise, to both Adam and Eve, that creation would NOT stay in futility forever. God would send Someone into creation itself, Someone born of a woman, an Offspring of a woman Who would crush the devil's head (3: 15). That Offspring was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was not just the Offspring of a woman but ultimately the "Offspring" / the Son of God, in the flesh – God joined to creation. The Kingdom or reign of God that Jesus brings is not only for you and me; it's for you and me who are part of God's CREATION. Creation is included in the Kingdome Jesus brings.

And so, when Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He took upon Himself the curse that had fallen upon creation. When Jesus rose again from the dead, He brought creation back to life again in His own resurrected and "re-created" Body. In His Ministry - a Ministry that continues today through the Ministry of His Church, where the created means of water and bread & wine are used as vehicles for God's Word - Jesus brings the Kingdom of God to creation, promising to restore it on the Last Day to God's original evaluation of it in Genesis 1:

"And God looked upon all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."(v.31)

As Paul says in the earlier quoted passage from Romans 8 (today's Epistle), again:

" ... the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Jesus came to restore creation, making it good again. Jesus' authority is for the good of creation.

That's what Jesus did with all of His miracles, and to understand Jesus' miracles correctly we need to understand them as works of the New Creation. Jesus' miracles are NOT related to us by the biblical writers just to show us that He's God (though they certainly do that); they're NOT done to answer a challenge being made to Him (though sometimes that's involved); they're certainly NEVER done to hurt or do something bad to anyone. Jesus' miracles are always, as we said last week, for good - they reveal the gracious reign or rule of God over creation.

And so, when Jesus does a miracle in the Bible, He reveals God's rule over us - showing mercy to us and saving us, just as He did the disciples who were perishing in that boat on the sea. When Jesus does a miracle in the Bible, He reveals that the rule or Kingdom of God includes the creation of God, the creation in which we all live. When Jesus does a miracle in the Bible, He reveals that the authority He has to reveal God's Kingdom is for good- the good of everyone; the good of everything.

That's why we Christians use the creation of God in service of God; we take care of it, not trashing it but treasuring it as God's gift to us. We are part of it, after all, destined to live forever in the creation made new when Jesus comes again. We see that in today's Gospel, when Jesus calms a stormy sea.

And on that note we conclude. Ya know, throughout the season of Epiphany Jesus is revealed to be certain things - three weeks ago, on the day of the Baptism of our Lord, Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God; two weeks ago, on the day we heard of Jesus' turning water into wine, He was revealed (similar to this week) to be the New Creator, the One Who restores and makes all things new by dying on a cross; last week Jesus was revealed to be the One Who has all authority, using His authority for good. This week Jesus is revealed to be the One Who uses authority for the good of creation. We do the same.

When creation rages against us, and we feel as though we're on a sea with its waves threatening to dash us under, we pray to God for deliverance. When He does deliver us, we give Him thanks. When He does NOT deliver us, we still give Him thanks that, on the Last Day, He will deliver us from all that's wrong with His created but fallen world. Either way, through it all we reflect the goodness of God in our use of what He has made. In that way we show that authority - including our authority, as God's people - is for the good of creation -

- In Jesus' ✠ Name,

Amen!