

“I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME:
VI – ‘SURVIVE!’”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
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Daniel 3:8-30

Luke 8:22-25

“Into each life, a little rain must fall.” You’ve probably heard that statement before, and if you’ve lived any length of time, you know how true it is. Life is good, a good gift from God, and more often than not, thanks be to God, things go well in life. Day in and day out things generally go pretty well. But, yes, every once in a while, “into each life, a little rain must fall.” In other words, stuff happens – sometimes not so good stuff.

Both of our lessons today illustrate that point very, very well. The lesson from the Hebrew scriptures is the amazing story of three Jewish men by the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (how are those for names?) Well, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego worked in the service of King Nebuchadnezzar. They were faithful men, loyal to him, but most of all, they were faithful Jews, loyal to God Almighty.

Well, one day, old Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue installed and he commanded that everyone in his court worship this golden statue – this golden idol, if you will. Everybody! If they didn't, the consequences would be severe.

Well, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, being, as I said, good and faithful Jews would not bow down and worship a false idol. Word came back to Nebuchadnezzar who reminded them of what would happen if they didn't, and still they wouldn't, so Nebuchadnezzar decided that they should die a horrible, horrible death. He would have them thrown into a fiery furnace where they would perish.

It doesn't get much worse than that, does it? All these three men were doing was being faithful to Almighty God, and because they were, it would cost them their lives. And so, one day, after Nebuchadnezzar had the heat of the fire cranked up as high as it would go, his men threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into that fiery furnace where they would surely die a horrible, horrible death. It was not at all how they thought their life would go.

Switch over to the Gospel lesson from Luke and we find Jesus and his disciples enjoying a day on the water in their boat. What better way to relax with good friends and confidantes? There's nothing better than being on the water or

near the water – there’s something very restorative about that – and I’m sure all of them were at peace and happy as could be.

And then, in an instant, a horrible storm whipped up. I remember when I was visiting the Holy Land and we were on the Sea of Galilee they showed us how those violent storms happen – they come in through this valley that acts as a kind of funnel which focuses the center of the storm on the water and makes them really intense – and that is what happened. A horrible, fierce storm whipped up, tossing that boat to and fro, and scaring the disciples to death. What started out as a calm, tranquil, wonderful day on the water with friends was about to have a disastrous end – it looked like they could all die by drowning – just that fast. None of them, when they got in the boat that day, thought that in just a few hours it could all be over – but stuff happens, bad stuff happens sometimes, when you least expect it.

Well, about a year ago, something happened to someone in our extended church family. His name is Bill Mackie, Mary’s husband, and on August 11th of last year, he got up to go about another day of work on his family farm, just like he has done most of his life. But it turned out to be anything but just another day of work. Take a look at the screen and first you’ll see a news account of what happened and you’ll hear Bill and I talk about what happened to him that day.

VIDEO

Indeed, it was a miracle that Bill survived that accident. His leg was absolutely trapped in that augur, so trapped that, as you heard, medical staff was flown in by helicopter from Shock Trauma in Baltimore in the event that they would have to amputate it right there on the farm. It was a really bad accident that happened in the midst of what Bill thought was going to be just another day on the farm.

Yet though it looked like things might turn out horribly, God came in and made a way, and not only made a way for Bill to be rescued thanks to the incredible efforts of all of the rescue personnel, but God made a way for Bill to find comfort and peace in the midst of it all, through the vision of the Lord that came to him.

God made a way for the others we've talked about today as well. You heard the incredible ending to the Old Testament story. Not only did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego not die in the fiery furnace, they survived unscathed, and their survival so touched Nebuchadnezzar that he gave up worship of false gods and worshipped God Almighty only.

God made a way for the disciples as well. When that storm threatened to capsize their boat and drown them all, Jesus stood up and calmed the storm, and made all things well. God made a way.

My friends, God always makes a way for us – through good times and bad. The word of the day is “survive” – how do we do that, come what may? By remembering that always, always, always, God is with us, to carry us through whatever comes. Things will happen that we’re not expecting, things will happen that we think we can’t get through, but friends, we can, because God is with us, and will always make a way.

There is a creed in the back of our hymnal that contains these wonderful words:

“In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone.

Thanks be to God.”

Thanks be to God indeed!

And let all God’s people say, “Amen.