

Advent Midweek Sermon, Week 2 – “Buffeted”

Romans 15:4

If you ask someone in the housing market what the three most important things are when investing in real estate, you are likely to hear the response: “location, location, location”. Location is also important when it comes to our journey through this world on our way to our heavenly home. Therefore, this evening's focus for Advent has to do with where faith is located, especially during those times when we are “buffeted,” or tossed back and forth and pounded by the storms of life.

Horatio Spafford wrote our sermon hymn for this evening “When Peace, like a River” (Also known as “It is well with my soul”; *LSB* 763). I've mentioned Horatio Spafford before when we had this as a hymn of the month back in 2017. Horatio's sort of a modern day Job (who we've been talking about in our Sunday morning Bible study). Horatio Spafford and his wife's problems began when their only son died of pneumonia at the age of 4. Later, even though Horatio had become a successful businessman in the Chicago area, the great Chicago fire of 1871 wiped out his business. Two years later, when the Spafford's planned on taking a vacation in Europe, Horatio ran into some last-minute business problems so he sent his wife and four daughters on ahead of him. In the middle of the Atlantic, their ship was struck by another ship and sank. While Mrs. Spafford survived, their four young daughters' drown. Immediately, Horatio boarded the next ship for Europe to join his wife. During his voyage, the ship's captain called for him to come up to the bridge. The captain informed Horatio that they were close to the spot of the tragic shipwreck which claimed the lives of his four daughters. It's hard to imagine how that must have made Horatio feel, but after they passed the spot, he went to his cabin and composed the first stanza of this hymn:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;
When sorrows, like sea billows, roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

These words remind me of Job's words, “*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21).

How is it that God's people can say and believe such amazing words? The answer would be of great help to you and me when we are tossed about by the storms of life. Separation from people and things dear to us—can stir up feelings of anger, worry, disappointment and sorrow. All of us are no doubt familiar with such emotions, making us feel “buffeted,” which is our theme this evening. It's easy to feel “buffeted” or tossed back and forth and pounded by the troubles in our lives.

Thank God for the advent of His Son. The word ‘advent’ means ‘coming.’ During the season of Advent we think not only about the coming of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem so that He could be buffeted or tossed back and forth and pounded to death on a cross to pay for our sins and then rise from the dead in victory over all the storms of life, but we also think of His resulting promise to come in all His glory on the Last Day to take us to our heavenly home with Him.

Last Wednesday I spoke about feeling left behind at times in this life, but not without hope for the future because our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ, is ahead of clearing the way. Last Sunday I mentioned how our Lord keeps us on level ground—on an even keel during the roller coaster ride of this life through the promises in His Word. God’s Word, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper is the “location, location, location” where God creates and sustains our faith in the Good News of our eternal future with Him through Jesus Christ. So, we are “behind,” but not without certain hope for a glorious future. And we are “buffeted” by the storms of life, but anchored on faith.

“On faith” might sound a bit strange. We usually speak of faith in reference to what God puts in our hearts through His Word and Sacrament of Holy Baptism. But once God puts faith in our hearts, the sinful nature that we’re born with begins to attack our new hearts of faith. It’s like getting a heart transplant. Our natural immune system considers a new heart as a threat and can start to attack it. Therefore, after a heart transplant, most people need to take immunosuppressants or anti-rejection medicine for the rest of their earthly lives to prevent their body from rejecting their new heart.

When it comes to our new heart of faith, God’s anti-rejection medicine is His Word—His objective truth and promises which are centered on Jesus Christ, which are also referred to as “the faith.” Our new hearts of faith in Jesus Christ is transplanted and sustained in us by the faith—the anti-rejection medicine of God’s Word and promises (also located in connection to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). “Location, location, location.”

So, back to Horatio Spafford and to us. How can we, when buffeted by the storms of life, still say, “It is well, it is well with my soul”? When our faith is located on the faith—on the truth of God’s Word. In our Epistle reading this evening, St. Paul said, “*Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Ro 15:4). To be able to have and maintain hope for the future, we focus on the written and spoken Word of God—the Good News of our eternal salvation through our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Through this Gospel message God gives us endurance, encouragement and the anti-rejection medicine we need to keep our faith in the faith especially when we are buffeted back and forth and pounded by the storms of life.

With all that’s happening in our world today and in your own lives, does it make any sense not to locate ourselves where God locates Himself to fill us with His richest blessings through His Word and Sacraments. In the Divine Service, Bible study, and daily devotions, God enables us to say at all times “It is well, it is well with my soul.”

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.