

Pastor's Article for Fayette County Union – due June 19, 2008

Have You Forgotten Us God?

The water was surging up through the floor drains and gushing out of the basement toilet so fast and so hard it seemed like it was hooked to a fire hydrant. It smelled awful and was the color of the stuff you usually flush down the toilet. No matter what the homeowner tried, he couldn't stop it. We both stood there, helpless, as the flooding waters began to fill his basement. It was one of the worst feelings of my life, standing there so helpless, not knowing what to do.

A helicopter was flying off in the distance. I wondered about the emergency, who was hurt, who was dying, and to which destination the helicopter was flying as they heroically saved a patient. Were they going to La Crosse, Iowa City, or Rochester? As I drove closer to the town I realized this was no ordinary helicopter. Dark black in color, it was flying lower and lower to the ground, circling, with guns pointed out of its doors. Suddenly a feeling rushed through me, the feeling of imminent danger, like when you surprise an attack dog and all your body systems jump into high alert. Danger! Danger! Danger! As I drove through town, I was dazed, confused, shocked, and angry to see armed men with heavy duty guns and bulletproof vests blocking off the roads and surrounding the factory. It was one of the most frightening things I've ever seen in my life. I didn't know what to do. Should I stop? Should I keep driving? Should I try to find out what's going on? I decided to keep driving. For the rest of my life I will wonder if that was the right thing to do. But I kept driving. I had an appointment in La Crosse with a seriously ill parishioner who was waiting to see me. But should I have stopped? Which was the more serious crisis? I felt so helpless as I drove through that town and watched through the windows that day.

The feelings in both situations were the same. Helplessness. Frustration. Fear. Not knowing what to do. Shock. Surprise. Dazed confusion. Grief. Anger. Despair. Powerlessness.

One was a nature caused disaster – the flood in Eldorado. The other was a human caused disaster – the immigration raid in Postville. The results were the same: destruction of home and family, terrorized victims, grief, pain, sorrow, and a mess to clean up in the end.

Why o God why? Why do such things happen? Where are you when we need you? Why didn't you stop the flood, the raid, the terror? Why do you leave us so helpless when we are down here fighting one disaster after another? It never seems to end this year: tornadoes, floods, raids. When is it ever going to end? What have we done? What have we done wrong? Do we deserve this O God? Are you punishing us God? Why don't you come down and put an end to it all? Houses are swamped, businesses are destroyed, crops are flooded, families are torn apart. Don't you care God? I thought you said you loved us. If so, why all of this? What did we do to deserve this?

These words are called words of lament. A lament is to “mourn aloud.” It is to “express sorrow, mourning, or regret for- often demonstratively.” Laments are the cries at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the screams of a mother holding her child while her husband is torn away, the tears of frustration as the waters roar and foam, the cries of terror in the night as the tornadoes wantonly destroy. Lamentations are words God needs to hear.

How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
(Psalm 13:1)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
(Psalm 22:1)

Go ahead. Let God have it today. It's O.K. It's not only O.K.; it's much more than O.K. You don't have to have permission. It's being honest. It's being real. It's being human. God needs to know. God wants to know. If God is our God, if God is truly your God, then be honest with your feelings and let God have it.

Where are you God? Have you abandoned me o God? Why God why?
One of my favorite prayers begins,

“Help us, in the midst of things we cannot understand...”

There is much we cannot understand right now. Tornadoes, floods, raids, have hit us all hard and left our state, our friends and our neighbors reeling. Yet the prayer continues,

“... to believe and trust...”

Are we helpless? No. Sometimes it just feels that way. We need to let God know when it feels that way. We need to be real with God. Yet we can still believe. We can still trust. God is God and there is no other.

Are we helpless? No. Though the waters roar and foam and the storms rage around us, the kingdom of God is at hand - our hands. We can pick up a mop, haul out the junk from the basement, wash off the muck and stink, listen to the victims, comfort the suffering, hug a terrorized child, feed the hungry, write a letter to our congressman.

It's time to get to work. We'll deal with God later.