

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 5th Sunday after Pentecost, June 24, 2018.

I would like us to consider this morning as Common Sense Sunday.

In the same way that Thomas Paine and his *Common Sense* set the stage for the Declaration of Independence, this morning's lessons suggest why it makes sense for you and me, not only to acknowledge God, but to place God at the center of our lives.

This morning's collect sets the tone. "O Lord, we beseech thee, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name."

Fear of God and love of God. In the words of a very popular song of the 1950s, "You can't have one without the other." At least, we shouldn't have one without the other. It doesn't make sense to have one without the other.

From our first lesson today (**Job 38:1-11**), here is God speaking to Job: "I will question you, and you shall declare to me." The relationship is absolutely clear. "Surely you know!" with an exclamation mark. "Thus far shall you come, and no farther."

You and I would be foolish not to fear a God with this kind of power and clarity. It makes sense to fear God.

Contrast this very authoritative attitude with our lesson from Mark (**Mark 4:35-41**). Here, as Jesus faces a storm, are these words "Peace! Be still!" Each, by the way, with an exclamation mark.

You and I would be foolish not to love a God with this kind of compassion. It makes sense to love God.

For all the questions we might have about the Christian Faith, two qualities of God are crystal clear. God is powerful. And God is loving. Stated another way, God uses power to love. Love is a vehicle of power. It makes sense to embrace both.

The Hebrews understood well this combination of power and love. This morning's psalm (**Psalms 107:1-3, 23-32**) is a wonderful example. "Then he spoke, and a stormy wind arose, which tossed high the waves of the sea. They mounted up to the

heavens and fell back to the depths; their hearts melted because of their peril. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper and quieted the waves of the seas. Then they were glad because of the calm, and he brought them to the harbor they were bound for.”

Now, it is possible to interpret this passage as God playing with the people, messing with them, putting them in danger and then rescuing them at the last second. You and I have probably felt this way at times. But the reason that we have felt this way is perhaps because we forget what we did in the first place, which was to disobey. God didn't begin this dance. We did. We strayed. We knew the boundaries, and went beyond them. We put ourselves in a bind. God's role was to remind us of what we should have been doing and then, out of profound love, rescue us.

Power and love. Not always easy to understand. That's why we have people like St. Paul. In his Second Letter to the early Christians at Corinth (**II Corinthians 6:1-13**), he acknowledges how challenging life can be. He lists a number of hardships, really difficult circumstances. Some of these challenges are of our making and some we simply cannot escape. Through it all, though, God is on our side.

Here's one of the most reassuring passages of the New Testament. “We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” How are these benefits possible? God's love.

In today's gospel, the disciples are being tossed around by the storm. They are afraid. What do they do? They wake Jesus, and rather than saying “We need some help here,” they say “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Sounds like some prayers of disappointment that we might have offered in the course of a lifetime. And the response of Jesus also sounds like something we might have heard. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

And the disciples' response – “they were filled with great awe” – is probably also familiar. We're here. No matter what our situation in life, we still believe that God has our back. We don't always understand the how, but we trust the why. God loves us.

St. Paul writes, “As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.” “In vain.” An interesting term. It means “to no avail.” The short version is “Forget it. Don’t even try. It’s a dead end.”

For Paul, and for you and me, the “grace of God” is not a dead end. It is salvation. We are rescued from foes and ourselves. Life is still tough, but we are not alone as we face these challenges. Paul offers a long list of challenges, but then he offers a long list, a more impressive list, of God’s saving acts. He gives these saving acts a title: “weapons of righteousness.”

These weapons, these gifts, these techniques, are available to you and me. We are to be an extension of Christ. Not only are we forgiven, we are deputized. Our badge is the cross. We don’t take Christ’s sacrifice for granted. We know we don’t deserve that kind of forgiveness. But we also know that the God who could strike us down in a nano-second – power – cares so much for us that His Son will die for us – love.

From Psalm 107: “He stilled the storm to a whisper and quieted the waves of the sea. Then were they glad because of the calm, and he brought them to the harbor they were bound for.”

You and I are bound for a harbor. It’s a place of calm. No more stormy seas. A journey made possible by a loving God. We’re not there yet, however. The stormy seas are still a factor in our lives. Fear is real. But, in the boat with us, contending with the same elements that challenge us, is our Lord, assuring us that we will be okay. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Love is real.

Which takes us back to this morning’s Collect. Each week there are two versions of the Collect, one in traditional language and one in contemporary language. Note that today’s traditional version uses the phrase “make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name,” while the contemporary version speaks of “perpetual love and reverence.” From “Fear and love” to “reverence and love.”

I’m not sure why the editors chose to change “fear” to “reverence.” What I am sure of is that “reverence” includes both respect for God’s power and thanksgiving for God’s love. They are sides of the same Common Sense coin. You can have one without the other, but it’s not a good idea, nor is it an accurate idea. Much better to recognize both and honor both. Something like “Dear Lord, help us, please” and “Dear Lord, thank you very much.” Amen.

