

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2010
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scriptures: Psalm 80:1-2; Isaiah 5:1-7; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12: 49-56

RESTORE US, O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY

"A priest died and was waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him was a guy in sunglasses, a loud shirt, leather jacket, and jeans.

Saint Peter addresses this cool guy, 'Who are you, so that I may know whether or not to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven? The guy replies, "I'm Jack, a retired Continental Pilot from Houston."

Saint Peter consults his list. He smiles and says to the pilot, 'Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom.' The pilot goes into Heaven with his robe and staff.

Next, it's the priest's turn. He stands erect and booms out, 'I am Father Bob, pastor of Saint Mary's in Pasadena for the last 43 years.' Saint Peter consults his list. He says to the priest, 'Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the Kingdom.

'Just a minute,' says the good father. 'That man was a pilot and he gets a silken robe and golden staff and I get only cotton and wood. How can this be?

'Up here - we go by results,' says Saint Peter. 'When you preached - people slept. When he flew, people prayed.'

This past week we have been hearing the stories about the airline attendant who went berserk because of a confrontation with a passenger, so he grabbed two bottles of beer and escaped the plane by way of the emergency chute. Well, I decided that I needed to have an airline-type story to begin this morning, and an airline pilot and a

preacher sounded like a good combination. I hope the result of my message this morning will not be to put you all to sleep.

Over and over again in Psalm 80 is the plea from the people to God. "Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." "Revive us, and we will call on your name." they cry out to the Lord. I am reminded of the great old hymn which I could have chosen for this morning because it so closely follows the thoughts of the Psalmist.

We praise Thee, O God!
For the Son of Thy love,
For Jesus Who died,
And is now gone above.
Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Hallelujah! Amen.
Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Revive us again.

We praise Thee, O God!
For Thy Spirit of light,
Who hath shown us our Savior,
And scattered our night.
Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Hallelujah! Amen.
Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Revive us again.

All glory and praise
To the Lamb that was slain,

Who hath borne all our sins,
 And hath cleansed every stain.
 Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
 Hallelujah! Amen.
 Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
 Revive us again.

Revive us again;
 Fill each heart with Thy love;
 May each soul be rekindled
 With fire from above.
 Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
 Hallelujah! Amen.
 Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
 Revive us again.

The church of Jesus Christ, the people of Jesus Christ need to be revived in their faith and commitment to God. We need a renewal of our values and beliefs. We need to take out our Bibles, dust them off, and get into reminding ourselves of what we learned in Sunday School as children. We need to recall the words of the hymns and songs we sang way back when because they spoke the truths of the Bible in an easy singable style.

How about this wonderful hymn written in 1873 by the great writer of hymns, Philip Bliss, for his Sunday School class at First Congregational Church in Chicago, Illinois? It is called "Dare to Be a Daniel."

Standing by a purpose true,
 Heeding God's command,

Honor them, the faithful few!
All hail to Daniel's band
Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.

Many mighty men are lost
Daring not to stand,
Who for God had been a host
By joining Daniel's band.
Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.

Many giants, great and tall,
Stalking through the land,
Headlong to the earth would fall,
If met by Daniel's band.
Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.

Hold the Gospel banner high!
On to vict'ry grand!
Satan and his hosts defy,

And shout for Daniel's band.

Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone!

Dare to have a purpose firm!

Dare to make it known.

And there is this little Sunday School song called, "Jesus Wants Me For a Sunbeam".

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,

To shine for Him each day;

In every way try to please Him,

At home, at school, at play.

A sunbeam, a sunbeam,

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam;

A sunbeam, a sunbeam,

I'll be a sunbeam for Him.

Jesus wants me to be loving,

And kind to all I see;

Showing how pleasant and happy

His little one can be.

I will ask Jesus to help me

To keep my heart from sin,

Ever reflecting His goodness,

And always shine for Him.

A sunbeam, a sunbeam,

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam;

A sunbeam, a sunbeam,
I'll be a sunbeam for Him.

I'll be a sunbeam for Jesus;
I can if I but try;
Serving Him moment by moment,
Then live with Him on high.

. "Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." People need to return to faith and worship in order to save and restore the culture and the world. You say it's naive, you say it's too simple, you say it's impossible? I say it may sound naive, it may be too simple; but it better not be impossible. God's Word tells us the truth. Matthew 19:26 says, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Right now, there are two generations of people who have grown up having no experience of church and Sunday School, no experience of singing hymns of faith or hearing the stories of Daniel in the Lion's Den, David and Goliath, Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand, the Crucifixion, or the apostle Paul being lowered in a basket over the city wall to escape his pursuers. They do not know the importance of the Word being preached in worship. There are those who do not even recognize the 23rd Psalm, nor do they know the words of the Lord's Prayer. They know there are Ten Commandments, but their knowledge is limited to not stealing or not murdering. They are unaware of what the first commandment is. "And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the LORD your God... 'You shall have no other gods before Me.' First, foremost, and always there is only God. We are to honor, praise, worship and glorify Him and Him alone.

The passage from Hebrews which I read this morning is a continuation of what we heard last Sunday, a record of the heroes of our faith, and what an amazing story it is. It breaks my heart when I think of all those who have never heard that story repeated over and over again throughout their lives. The writer of the book says it so well:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 **the world was not worthy of them.** They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

The world then was not worthy of them, and the world today is no different and no better. We are not worthy of those who gave up everything— even their lives— rather than to go against their faith in God. They refused to give up their purity and become like everyone else in the immoral culture in which they lived. And that infuriated those whose own values disallowed nothing and welcomed everything— even the most ugly and depraved practices. Why was their faith in God strong, no matter what? Because God as revealed in Christ Jesus was the most important thing in their lives. Today's world is in sad need of men and women whose belief in Jesus Christ is the compelling force in their lives. Let us echo the words of the Psalmist who wrote: "Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name."

Another reason why people need to return to God and to the Church is to find a source of help and support when times are rough. That help and support comes not only from brothers and sisters in the Lord in the present, but also all those who have gone before, the Marys and Marthas, the Abrahams and Isaacs, your parents and grandparents who have died. I call them our wonderful cheerleaders. They are all around in spirit, like a cloud, a cloud of witnesses as Hebrews puts it. Here the words again:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Friends, let us fix our eyes on Jesus as we run this race called life and repeat once again, ““Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.” Amen.