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Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Martin Luther once said that that to which we turn in our most dire of need is our god.

That to which we turn in our most dire of need is our god.

It is a saying that speaks volumes in light of our gospel reading for today.

For notice that the disciples in our gospel are in the most dire of circumstances.

In our gospel reading, we find the disciples in a boat which is being swamped by a great windstorm.

Powerful waves are beating the boat.

Water is coming in from all sides.

All the disciples are terrified. This could be it.

They really do think they are about to die.

They are in the most dire of circumstances.

PAUSE

And then there is Jesus, who is there in the back of the boat.

And Jesus, well he is far from concerned, right?

He is there in the back of the boat sleeping on a cushion.

And no doubt the text is telling us something about Jesus if he is able to rest soundly during this most dire of circumstances.

The text is telling us something about Jesus if he can sleep during this violent storm.

In times of trouble, Jesus is able to embrace a deep and profound inner peace, where we as people under those same circumstances are wracked by fear, anxiety, and despair.

PAUSE

And so, what do the disciples do, but they proceed to wake Jesus up, saying, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”

PAUSE

And now maybe, just maybe, we are inclined to think that the disciples here turn to Jesus here in their most dire of circumstances.

And so, we want to say, “Good job, disciples.”

Again, that to which we turn in our most dire of circumstances is our God.

Maybe we want to say, “Way to go, disciples.” They get it. They turn to Jesus.

But not so fast.

For apparently, the disciples are not to be praised.

For we see Jesus challenges their faith. “Have you still no faith?”

And furthermore, Jesus questions why they are afraid.

And notice, too, how the disciples address Jesus in this story.

They address him as “teacher.”

Not as “Lord,” not as “God.”

And even the final question of the story tells us that the disciples did not turn to Jesus thinking he would save them.

The disciples ask, “Who is this? Who is Jesus...that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

PAUSE

That to which we turn in our most dire of circumstances is our God.

This is a profound story that highlights Martin Luther’s saying.

PAUSE

Now, perhaps, we have observed people in times when they were experiencing their most dire of circumstances.

Perhaps, we have seen people overcome by loss, by grief, by despair, by fear, by anxiety.

And perhaps, we have noticed that to which they have turned.

Perhaps, we can think of times when we ourselves have been overcome by these same emotions—loss, grief, despair, fear, anxiety.

Perhaps, we can think of times maybe when we have felt like the disciples in that swamped boat, where it seemed like the end, if not the end of life itself, then certainly the end of life as we had known it.

And perhaps, we can recall that to which we turned.

PAUSE

Now, some people we know will turn to things like alcohol or gambling.

Some people will turn to shopping, or to work, or to eating, or to any number of other distractions.

And though, we would not necessarily call these things gods.

After all we are not talking about worshipping some pagan god.

We are not talking about giving devotion to the Greek god Zeus, or to the Egyptian god Ra, or to the Norse god Thor.

No, we are not talking about these obvious gods.

But we are talking about more subtle gods that creep their way into our lives.

Who is the god or gods, with a little g, we turn to for distraction, for comfort, for peace?

And do those gods really offer us the comfort and peace we seek?

PAUSE

Now, fear seems to be the measuring rod.

Fear is the barometer. Fear is the litmus test.

For notice, this is what Jesus asks his disciples when they are in the boat being swamped.

“Why are you afraid?” Jesus asks.

Jesus can see the fear in the faces of his disciples.

And yet, the disciples have been with Jesus for some time now, and they have seen what he can do.

He has healed people. He has taught with authority. He has put the religious elite in their place.

And still the disciples don't know exactly what to make of Jesus.

Again, it is not that they wake Jesus up from his nap in the boat because they are putting their TRUST in Jesus, but they are wondering why Jesus isn't concerned like the rest of them, that they are going to sink.

In short, the disciples are still afraid, even though they have had Jesus with them all this time.

Yes, that to which we turn, that in which we put our trust, in the midst of our most dire of circumstances, should help alleviate our fear.

It may not erase all our fear, but by all means, it should help, right—unless, like we said, the thing to which we turn is a false god, a god with a little g.

If fear is still ever present, then we have to question the power of the god to which we turn.

False gods like the ones we have already listed...those gods may distract us for a short time, or even a long time...

But those false gods will probably only exacerbate our fear and anxiety in the long run.

Fear is a very good measuring rod for whether that to which we turn in our dire circumstances, is working for us or not.

And Jesus, like we said, calls his disciples on it.

When he sees the fear of his disciples in the boat, he asks, “Why are you afraid?”

“Whatever god you are relying on, disciples, isn’t working for you.”

PAUSE

And so, we come to trusting in the true God.

What does it mean to trust in God?

Trust is more than learning about God.

For the disciples call Jesus their “teacher,” and obviously they have been learning from Jesus.

And yet this learning has not been enough for them to trust in Jesus.

No, FAITH is what brings about solid trust.

In truth, it is probably “learning and faith,” “head and heart” together that is necessary.

But, I will go a step further.

I will go a step further and say that faith is also something that hinges on sight.

And I get it, that the Bible says, “We live by faith and not by sight.”

But there is also the saying that says, “Seeing is believing.”

PAUSE

In John 11, Jesus heals a blind man and Jesus asks the man, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

And the blind man says, “Who is that?”

And Jesus says, “You have SEEN him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

And the blind man says, “Lord, I believe.”

He doesn’t use the word “teacher,” like the disciples in the boat.

No, the man who had been blind, says, “LORD, I believe.”

He believes because he has seen Jesus. And he has seen what Jesus can do.

This is huge, Friends.

This blind man believes, because he has seen what Jesus can do.

Similarly, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is asked by Jesus whether she believes, whether she believes that those who believe in me (Jesus) will never die.

Mary responds, “Yes, LORD, I believe.” And Mary does indeed see her brother Lazarus raised from the dead.

Seeing is believing. Faith is about head and heart, and eyes.

PAUSE

And thus the question, before us, is this. Do we trust Jesus is our God?

Do we trust that come what may, when faced with the most dire of circumstances, do we trust that we can turn to the Lord and God in Jesus Christ will alleviate our fear and save us?

Will we commit our concern to Jesus?

Will we cry out for help to Jesus?

Will we say, “Lord, I believe”?

But if we are still unsure, if in that moment we still have doubts, then we are to recall those times when we have SEEN Jesus at work in our lives in the past.

Think of those times when friends, or family, or fellow Christians have been there for us, prayed for us, counseled us?

Think of those times when we have experienced the assurance of hope, the comfort of peace, and the grace of the blessings of God.

Seeing is believing.

But fear...fear makes us see only that which is right in front of us at the moment—the obstacle, the hardship, the adversity.

Fear limits our sight to right here.

But faith makes us see beyond to the new day, the new life, the hope that is the future.

Faith makes us see beyond, because we have had the assurance, comfort, and grace of the past workings of God in our life.

PAUSE

So, yes, that to which we turn in our most dire of circumstances is our god.

But, that to which we turn to everyday, is also our God.

And seeing God every day makes the dire of circumstances less dire, because we know the God in Jesus Christ who has always been there with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.