

Conley Memorial and Siloam Presbyterian Churches, Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

God Showed Up

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Jeremiah 31:1-6 Colossians 3:1-4 Matthew 28:1-10

The title of my message today is taken from a homily written by the Rev. Amy Butler at the Riverside Church in New York City. Bob Ayala, who you know, brought her homily to my attention. He said that the homily gave him “a word of hope”, as it did for me when I read it. It had an incredibly strong message which every Christian needs to hear. I will share a portion of her message with her permission with you in a few minutes.

She wrote it immediately after last fall’s presidential election in response to fears of many people about the outcome of the election.

I think that in any election, local, state or national, people do have fears about the outcome, no matter whether the persons they voted for won or not. If their candidates won they may rejoice but deep within they may fear that the newly elected persons may not be able to accomplish all of the many things they hoped for and which the candidates promised. If their candidates lost, they may have deep concerns about what the winners might do to counter those things which are considered to be important. That is the nature of elections and their inevitable aftermath.

For many people elections become an almost spiritual experience as people pray fervently for this or that outcome.

Whatever the outcome, inevitably it is never as good as might have been hoped or as bad as might have been feared.

Such is not always the case with other things that we encounter in life, yet we do fear things.

It may be something as trivial as the slight possibility of encountering a poisonous snake in the woods or something as catastrophic as nuclear war.

Jeremiah certainly encountered many things in his life of which he rightly would have feared but he didn’t worry. His faith was strong and in due course God showed up.

In our reading from Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae, Paul stresses that if

we seek God, our fears will be meaningless. God will show up.

In the reading from Matthew, dispirited women went to the tomb. Their worst fears had come to pass when Jesus had been crucified and now they were going to his tomb to anoint his body. But that didn't happen. God showed up.

God does show up when our fears are the greatest. We need to remember that.

In the words of Rev. Butler at the Riverside Church. *"It's important for us to name that fear, because when we do not recognize our fears they begin to animate our lives, to inform our choices, to turn us into grasping and greedy people who eventually become void of meaningful relationships and the rich diversity of human community.*

"As people of faith, we know that one way to face our fears with courage is to gather together with others and tell the stories of our faith again. Why? Because they are stories about moments when the world seemed like it was just about to end, when we were sure that God either didn't care or didn't exist, and when we were desperately afraid...but, then...God showed up.

'... as we sit with our fears, let's tell the stories again.

"In the beginning, when the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep...God showed up.

"And remember when Abram left everything—his country, his family, his father's house, to set out toward something he couldn't see? As he stood one night under an inky black sky, looking up into the great darkness above him and wondering if he'd made the biggest mistake of his life...God showed up.

"After decades of crippling enslavement in Egypt, the people had packed their possessions and gathered their families and they were already feeling the sweet winds of freedom. But suddenly they heard behind them the shouts of soldiers, the creak of chariot wheels, and trampling hooves of horses. Terrified, they sped up and looked toward what was ahead, seeing only the glassy blue of water as far as their eyes could see. It was certain death for them. And then...God showed up.

"For forty years they wandered. Once during their winding travel through the desert they got lost, so lost, and they ran out of water. As the last trickle dripped from the very last water bag and their children cried because they were thirsty, and their tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths, and they knew this was the end...well, God

showed up.

“King Ahasuerus ruled over Jewish exiles in Persia with the help of an influential aid named Haman. Haman had it out for the Jews—he hated the foreigners living in his country and he wanted them dead. So he convinced the king to allow him to completely eradicate them—to kill them all. But in the courage and wisdom of a young Queen Esther, chosen for such a time as this, ...God showed up.

“A young woman—just a teenager—living in ancient Galilee discovered that she was pregnant—certainly the end for any woman back then. In her desperation and fear she declared defiantly: “God’s mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” And then she carried that baby to term, delivered him in a stable, and laid him in a manger. And God showed up.

“A young rabbi’s message had begun to catch on. Crowds were turning out to hear him teach because they hoped beyond hope that he would finally be the one to deliver them from Roman rule. But he knew the message he was preaching wasn’t a message of political power; he was all about radical love, instead. And when you insist that people turn the other cheek and give away their possessions and love their enemies, they will take you down. He knew it was coming, but he had to keep preaching the truth. So he went down to the riverside where his cousin John was blessing and baptizing people. And he waded into the river, mud squishing through his toes, water cooling his skin. He held his breath as John dunked him under and he came up sputtering, just as scared as when he went in. And the heavens opened and a dove came down...and God showed up.

“He was one of ten, all Samaritans. Outsiders. They’d formed something like a little family because they’d been kicked out of their villages. They were sick and afraid and waiting to die. Leprosy. It would take, well, a miracle to get healed and welcomed back into community. And one day out on a dusty Galilean road they moved to the side as another traveler passed by. Shockingly, he stopped and spoke to them, offering words of hope, telling them to go see the priest because sometimes miracles actually

happen. And as the man turned and walked away this one leper ran back, sobbing, falling on the ground, overcome, his smooth hands reaching out in gratitude because...God showed up.

"It was barely believable, but they did it. He made them so mad that they killed him. Beat him to a pulp and nailed him to a cross and put him up on a hill, the steely gray sky as backdrop. He struggled through his final breaths, agony, until he finally breathed one last time. And the sky went completely dark and the curtain in the temple ripped in two and his friends, for whom he'd offered hope, wailed at the injustice of it all. And they took him down and cared for his body tenderly and buried him with deep respect and so much love, and then went back to their lives to try to imagine what might happen next. And three days later, well you know what happened: God showed up.

"God showed up. Over and over and over again, in the ancient stories of scripture and in the stories of our lives...what we live day in and day out. Think about your life. Think about all those moments when it appeared there was no hope to be found anywhere. And remember that God showed up.

"And God will show up again."

Alleluia! Amen.

Note: The homily of Rev. Amy Butler is quoted with her permission. Her full message is available on the Internet at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/talkwiththepreacher/2016/11/09/god-showed-up-a-meditation-for-the-day-after/>