



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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A Stephen Ministry Congregation
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FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 18, 2019

“Keep Calm and Carry On”

(John 16:20-22)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:20-22).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

I'm sure you've seen the poster. It's bright red with white writing. At the top of it is the crown of King George VI of the United Kingdom, the current queen's father, and under that in bold white letters it reads, "Keep calm and carry on." It was produced in 1939, the time when German planes were flying over Great Britain every night bombing London, Coventry, Liverpool and other industrial centers. The world had never seen anything quite like it: the air raid sirens every night, citizens hiding in basements and subway stations, the unbelievable noise and explosions, fires and destruction. Understandably, the British were terrified, and even worse were expecting the Nazis to invade their nation. To help with morale, the British government produced a poster: Keep calm and carry on.

The poster and the phrase have experienced a modern resurgence. It turns out to have meaning not just for the British during WW II, but for many of us, where we live, with our troubles. I don't want to trivialize the very real destruction and terror of the air raids and the understandable fear of the British, but people today can sometimes feel under assault. Maybe it's at work where you are being asked to produce even more, more than anyone can reasonably deliver. Or maybe people take shots at you on social media, for everyone to see, even a hundred years from now if they're interested. Maybe it's your body which has served so well for so long, but now is showing signs of mutiny. One of the refrains I often hear after the accident or the diagnosis or the affair, one of the refrains I often hear is, "It's amazing how quickly life can change."

When life does change for the worse, don't panic. "Keep calm and carry on." God is still in his heavens. Jesus is

still at the right hand of the Father. He still loves you and is still in charge. In Isaiah the Lord promises, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not sweep over you; when you walk through the fires you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is. 43:10). That is, you will have to pass through waters and walk through fire; no one gets out of this life unscathed. However, the Lord will see you through it.

In John chapters 15 and 16 Jesus has been warning his disciples about the hatred of the world. “I have chosen you out of the world” he says, “therefore the world hates you” (15:18). “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” A few verses later: “Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” (That’s surely relevant for many Christians today, particularly in Muslim lands.) In any event, can you imagine the anxiety and fear and discouragement of those early disciples? The world hates you, Jesus says, and will persecute you,” and whoever kills you will think he is doing God a service.

To make matters much worse Jesus keeps talking about being arrested and crucified, and then leaving them. “In a little while, you will see me no longer,” he says.

For the disciples of Jesus, I’m sure that all sounds like a nightmare . . . all that persecution and Jesus nowhere to be seen. So long as he’s physically with them, they know they’ll be okay. He’ll answer the tough, entrapping questions of their opponents. He’ll feed them if they really need to be fed, heal them if they really need to be healed. He’ll calm the storm. But if he leaves them, they lose all that. If he leaves them, they’re on their own, and they know they’re not ready for that. They are not strong, nor many in number, nor do they have a lot of resources, or knowledge or courage.

Jesus tries to comfort them. He tells them their grief will not last forever. “You will weep and lament . . . but

your sorrow will turn into joy.” One might summarize this text with two words: “Fear not.”

Theologian Walter Brueggemann says that’s the fundamental message of the Bible: “Fear not.” It’s the message to Moses, before going back to Egypt to free the Israelites. It’s the message to the people in the wilderness. It’s the message of the angels to Mary, and to the startled shepherds in the field, and to the grieving women at an open tomb: “Do not be afraid.” “Keep calm.” “Don’t panic.” It’s the message to everyone who sits in the darkness and ponders his or her mortality, or the mortality of the one they love.

Fear, especially the fear of death, is the great darkness that shadows our lives. That fear feeds into terrorism, leads to toxic policies, and can rob us of many of the joys of life ... from traveling abroad to meeting new people. But Jesus says, “Fear not. I am with you. Be not afraid, for I am your God.” “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

To believe in God, to trust in Jesus Christ, does not mean you can be immune from fears. It means you need not be held captive to them. To trust in Jesus is to live in the freedom of that the ultimate issues have been resolved, the ultimate victory has been won. God’s love has come and will come into our world and into our lives. God’s love will surround us and keep us every day of our lives right up to the last one and beyond.

Isn’t that the point of our text? “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” It’s like a woman giving birth, Jesus says. The process is full of pain and anguish, but once she has delivered the baby, she doesn’t think about the pain. She thinks about that newborn infant. Verse 22, “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

Author Anne Lamott tells a story about parenting her first child. Anne had taken her two-year-old son to Lake

Tahoe, where they stayed in a condominium by the lake. There are a lot of gambling establishments around, so all the rooms come with light-blocking blinds. That way you can gamble all night and sleep all day. To me that sounds perfectly miserable.

In any event, one day Anne put her young toddler to sleep in his Pack ‘n Play in a totally darkened bedroom and went to work writing in the next room. A few moments later she heard her toddler knocking on the door from inside. She got up to put him back to bed, but found the door was locked. Somehow he had managed to push the lock button on the doorknob. He was calling, “Mommy, Mommy,” and she was saying, “Just jiggle the doorknob, honey, push the button again.” Of course, the room was so dark he couldn’t see the button or even the doorknob. The child started to panic and wept loudly, uncontrollably. The mother did everything she could think of: she called the rental agency, the manager, she left frantic messages on answering machines; running back to talk through the door and try to comfort her son there in the dark, locked room. But by now the boy was fairly terrified.

Finally, she did the only thing she could think of, which was to lie down and slide her fingers under the door where there were a few centimeters of space. She told him over and over to do the same: to find her fingers under the door. Somehow, he did, and that quieted him down. They stayed like that for what seemed like a long time, until help came, the boy holding his mother’s fingers in the dark, feeling her presence, her care, her love, hearing her voice. It makes me think of the verse, “He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Sometimes you and I are like that two-year-old in the dark, safe, but not really aware that we are safe . . . frightened, more frightened than we need to be, and feeling more alone than we are. But God is always there, always present in the darkness. Remember, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the ultimate issues have been resolved. On the cross the ultimate victory was won. Therefore keep

calm. And remember he is faithful. God does not forget us, abandon us, ever, and therefore, finally, there is nothing to fear. “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while and you will see me.” Just a little while. Not long.

Till then, there’s no need to panic. Be still and know he is God.

Keep calm, *and carry on!* Carry on! When things go bad, keep doing what God has given you to do. Stay in your vocations and be the parent God has given you to be, the worker, the friend, the citizen. When things go bad, be the neighbor, the servant. Be the feet and hands and voice and face of Jesus.

And be the child, the child God has called you to be.
Amen.

