

Christian Optimism

Message for Sunday, June 1, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 9:2, 20-22; 14:26-27; John 16:33

Children's Message: Matthew 8:23-27.

Everyone choose a puppet from the puppet box. We're going to act out the Bible story which Nancy is going to read.

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

Let's all get into the (pretend) boat. We're rowing across the sea to the other side.

Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

Which one of you is Jesus? OK, so you're sleeping. The rest of us, we have to work! The boat is going to sink! Put down your oars, and start bailing water. Use whatever you've got: a drinking bottle, even your hands: scoop the water out of the boat.

Listen to the wind howling! Look at the size of those waves. Look out, here comes a big one! Just then, lightning struck right beside us. There was a huge crash of thunder – [right at that moment, one of the choir members who had come up behind the children dropped a heavy weight on a piece of plywood, making a loud bang!].

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

Go and shake Jesus, to wake him up. We need help!
He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The Jesus puppet waves his hands, and the sea is calm.

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

And we all looked at Jesus, and we realized we were in the presence of someone very special.

Back to Bruce now: What a difference it makes when we know Jesus. That's our goal in church: to know Jesus.

Sermon "Christian Optimism"

Christian optimism is based on faith, not fantasy

A girl was going out on a date with her new boyfriend, but her parents were appalled by the young man. He was dirty and unshaven. Now lots of people have tattoos, but this man had tattoos and pieces of metal all over his body.

The mother took the daughter aside and whispered, "We're concerned about your date, dear. He doesn't seem very nice."

The daughter replied, "If he wasn't nice, would he be doing 5,000 hours of community service?"

Being an optimist is a wonderful thing: it's an attitude, a way of looking at life that focuses on the good news, rather than dwelling on the bad news. But, as in that little episode I just told, sometimes optimism is blind to reality.

What I want to look at today is not plain, ordinary optimism; but *Christian optimism*. Someone has said that the difference between a mere optimist and a Christian optimist is that the former lives by the principle that life is good, and the latter by the principle that God is good.

In the Bible passage we just heard (Matthew 9:2), Jesus tells the paralyzed man, "Take heart."

Different translations phrase that command differently:

- Take heart
- Take courage
- Cheer up
- Be of good cheer
- It's all right

Through all of these, there is a sense of calm in the midst of a storm, of courage in the midst of difficulty.

There are 4 occasions recorded in the Bible when Jesus gave this command. In each of them, it is his presence which brings the peace and courage, not some blind optimism. Let's look at them.

1) The optimism of sins forgiven

Matthew 9:2, New Living Translation:

Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Take heart, son! Your sins are forgiven."

No one can have hope when they are bothered by guilt over some past sin, or by some present habit which they know is wrong. Until the sins in our lives are cleared

away, we will never know peace. But – oh! – the joy of those who know that they have been forgiven! Now there is someone who has a whole new outlook on life!

Michael was a student in seminary, training to be a pastor. For one of his courses, he was assigned to be a chaplain in a hospital, the Alexian Brothers Medical Center in Chicago. He was there every day, and he was on call for emergencies one night each week. Late one night, the phone rang, and Michael had to go.

A 16-year-old girl had been driving at night with friends, and she had backed into a light pole. The pole had broken off and then fallen forward, crashing down onto the car. A 12-year-old friend in the car had been severely injured; in fact, she was brain dead when she arrived at the hospital. Michael walked with the 12-year-old's family as they went through the wrenching process of realizing the truth and allowing the life support to be removed.

The following morning, Michael visited the hospital room of the 16-year-old driver. Physically, she was recovering well, but emotionally, she was distraught knowing that her actions had killed her friend. "I'm going to be like a daughter to her parents," she told Michael. "I'm going to go over to their house every day and baby-sit for them. I'll wash dishes for them every night. I'll go over there every week and mow their lawn."

Michael gradually helped her realize the truth that no matter what she did, she could never replace their daughter. She could never do enough to make up for her actions. All she could do was ask for forgiveness and hope that the parents would find it in their hearts to forgive her.

The parents who lost their daughter, graciously and lovingly did forgive this girl. She was set free from trying to pay back a debt she could never repay no matter what she did.

We can never make up to God for the wrong things we've done. Never. No matter how good we try to be from then on. All we can do is accept the forgiveness that God offers to us in Jesus Christ. But what a difference that makes!

2) The optimism of trusting Jesus

Matthew 9:20-22, New International Version:

A woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of

his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

Jesus turned and saw her. "**Take heart, daughter,**" he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

This woman believed in Jesus. She put her whole faith in him, trusting that he would help her. In her case, she was healed. Other times, Jesus chose to give a different kind of help. That's what happened to Paul when he cried out for help with his problem.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9, New International Version:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Sometime Jesus brings physical healing. Sometimes he brings inner healing. In either case, when we place ourselves in his care, we can be assured that we are in good hands. No matter how awful things may look, we can be at peace with him.

3) The optimism of knowing Jesus

The third occasion was at night when the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. A storm blew up, and they were getting nowhere against the waves which threatened to swamp the boat. That was bad enough, but then they saw what they thought was a ghost coming towards them, walking on the water.

Matthew 14:26-27, New Revised Standard Version:

When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**"

When Jesus got into the boat, the wind stopped. The disciples were amazed, and they worshipped him.

What a change Jesus makes in a situation. How quickly they changed from fear and despair to praise and adoration. Later on, knowing Jesus would enable them to rejoice when were beaten for preaching, to sing while in prison, and even to die with a smile [you can find all these events in Acts 5:40-41; 16:24-25; 7:59-60].

4) The optimism of victory

John 16:33, New Living Translation:

Jesus said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But **take heart**, because I have overcome the world."

It must be discouraging to play on a team that always loses. When I was growing up in Moose Jaw, there were four high schools in the city. Vanier School's football teams were so awful that they hadn't won a game in 20 years. So when the season started one year and they actually won a game, the City gave them a victory banquet to celebrate!

What if you knew that, even though your team always lost, that you were going to end up as winners in the final championship game? This is what Jesus promises us: "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." But that's not the end. There's more to come after that.

In other words, Jesus says to us, "Put things in perspective. The troubles you are experiencing now, as difficult and painful as they may be, will pass. But I am with you through it all. So don't give up. Keep on giving your best, as you look forward to your eternal home."

Blind optimism says, "Things have got to get better. They just have to!" But Christian optimism says, "Things will get better, in the end. But until then, I can still be glad: I am forgiven and loved; I have a Helper who has promised to stand by me and strengthen me; I have a friend who makes the sun to shine in my life no matter what clouds may be in the sky.

Next Steps:

- In what area of your life do you feel guilty, worried or afraid?
- Bring Jesus into that picture. Hear him saying to you, "Take heart." [Note: He doesn't promise to fix your problems for you; but you no longer face them alone.]