

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Here Comes Trouble

Sunday, March 8

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his home office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting.

When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind and they soon were in the air.

"Fly over the north side of the fire," yelled the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures," cried the photographer. "I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!" After a pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?" They were both in trouble!

Trouble has a way of finding in us in life. Trouble is simply a part of life. If we live in this world we will face trouble.

I was in high school, and it was a Friday afternoon. I had just returned home from playing tennis. I had made plans earlier that day to go out with my friends. And on my way up to my room my Mom and Dad called me into their bedroom. I walked in and told them that whatever they needed to tell me, it needed to be quick. I was running late. My Dad sat in a chair next to his bed taking off his shoes. My Mom stood beside him. My Dad looked up at me and said, "Son, I just got back from the doctor. I have cancer."

They threw a retirement party for him. They roasted him and presented him with all these awards. He had been with the company for a long time. His proud wife was there by his side. They asked what he was going to do in his retirement. "Travel," he said. The couple went on to tell about all the trips they had planned. They went home a proud and happy couple. The next day his wife collapsed and died.

They were a good family. They planned well. Invested their money. Their adorable kids would be taken care of. Well, Dad was at work. He got a call from his wife. She said, "Have you seen the news? We've lost it all." You see, they invested with a guy named Madoff.

That's the thing about trouble--it rarely announces itself before it comes. Trouble hardly ever says, "Here I come! Get ready!" We wish it would. At least we could prepare for it, or better yet, we could avoid it altogether. But life doesn't work that way. In fact, you are one of three people today--you are coming out of trouble, you are in the middle of trouble, or you about to get into trouble. That's life.

It is because of this truth that our lives are defined by how we respond to trouble. Think about it. Addicts are defined by their ability to numb themselves to trouble. Criminals act out destructively to trouble. Atheists blame the absence of God for trouble. Narcissistic victims exploit trouble to avoid responsibility. Look at many unhealthy people and you will see lives which have been defined by unhealthy responses to trouble. The late M. Scott Peck, who wrote *The Road Less Traveled*, even went so far as to say that the reason for much human dysfunction is the inability to face trouble.

At the bottom of all unhealthy responses to trouble is one bad word. This word is the enemy to all that brings life and joy and peace and hope. The word is "panic." Panic is the feeling of being out of control. Panic is grabbing anything that makes you feel like you are in control, even if it's unhealthy.

Sound familiar? Maybe you are putting on a good show to others, but inside you are coming apart at the seams. Perhaps your business is failing. Maybe you can't find a job in this economy and the bills are piling up. Maybe your marriage is on the rocks. Maybe you're living between doctor appointments and you are scared to death. Maybe the trouble you are facing is sending you into a panic.

I want you to know something. There is another choice besides panic. You can find peace in the midst of your storm. You can calm the raging tempest inside you. You can find help and hope.

James Moore tells the story of a man who once came to a farmer and asked to be taken on as a hired hand. "What can you do?" the farmer asked him. The man replied: "I can sleep when the wind blows." The farmer thought that was a strange answer, but he needed a worker so he hired him. Soon after, the farmer went away on a trip. A couple of weeks later, the farmer returned home one night and went to bed. But, a storm came up. Winds were blowing and lashing. The farmer woke and heard the winds and he remembered - the broken barn door - the weak place in the fence - and some ripped wire in the Chicken Coop.

Concerned about his livestock, he got up and went out into the storm to check on them and what do you think he found? The barn door, the fence, the chicken coop, had all been repaired. The animals were all safe and the hired worker was sleeping soundly. Then the farmer remembered what he had said: "I can sleep when the wind blows!" He could sleep because he had prepared ahead for the storm!

I submit to you this morning that we as Christians can sleep when the wind blows because we have a resource that can handle any storm. All that is needed is one thing.

Oh, I know people who have this one thing. I walked into a hospital room and saw a lady who had it. She was in her 40's dying of breast cancer. Her friends were throwing her a birthday party. There was cake beside her bed, and she had a pink party hat on her head. They were playing music and dancing. I thought, "This is not appropriate scene for someone who is about to die." The whole scene seemed strange until I saw her face. She had it.

My Dad had it. I would see it when he prayed. As a kid, I would open one eye as he prayed at the dinner table and watch him. He had it.

John Wesley had it. It is what transformed his ministry. He found it at Aldersgate.

Countless others have had it over the years, and it has made all the difference to their lives. It has given them strength to deal with trouble and inspiration to do extraordinary things.

What is it? It goes all the way back to Abraham. Oh, you remember Abraham, right? It all started with him. Because he had it, all the rest of us can have it. He had it when God told him to leave everything he knew, and he didn't know where he was going. He had it when God told him and his wife Sarah they were going to have children, when, huh, they no longer had the resources to procreate. Abraham had it.

You know what it is? It's described all over scripture:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. –Hebrews 11:1-3

You see, Christians are not perfect. Christians are not in control. Christians don't have all the answers. Christians are not better than other people. Christians are not folks that can give the perfect theological answer to every question.

Christians are those who have learned, like Abraham, that God can be trusted. God can be trusted to give peace in the midst of the storm. God can be trusted to take what is evil and transform it into something good. God can be trusted to empower you in the midst of trouble. God can be trusted to receive you when you die. God can be trusted! (Reference Hebrews 11, by faith, by faith).

If we don't believe this, we might as well be on the golf course today or at the beach. If we don't believe this then we are just playing church. The church is not some charity organization. The church is not some glorified non-profit. The church is a body of people that believe that Jesus can be trusted.

Do you believe that? Faith is not giving up. It is giving in to the only power that can be trusted.

The late great spiritual writer Henri Nouwen learned this truth at the circus! Nouwen went to see the German trapeze group "The Flying Rodleighs" perform. He was mesmerized by their breath-taking performance as they flew gracefully through the air.

At the end of the show, he spoke with the leader of the troupe, Rodleigh himself. Nouwen asked him how he was able to perform with such grace and ease so high in the air. Rodleigh responded, "The public might think

that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher...The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me. The worst thing the flyer can do is try to catch the catcher. I'm not supposed to catch Joe. It's Joe's task to catch me" (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), pp.195-196).

When trouble comes, so often we try to grab on to God. We think if we do enough mental gymnastics or enough fanciful praying, we can somehow catch God. It's not our job to catch God. God catches us.

I remember it well. It had been a difficult time for me. Real trouble had come.

"I'm in deep," I cried out to God.

"I'm deeper," God replied.

"How deep?" I asked.

"Let go and see," God sighed.

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote a story about a storm. In the story he describes a ship caught off a rocky coast threatening death to all on board. When terror among the people was at its worst, one man, more daring than the rest, made a perilous trip up to the captain's house.

When he got there, he saw the captain lashed to his post, with his hands on the wheel and turning the ship little by little into the open sea. When the captain saw the ghastly white, terror-stricken face of the man, he smiled, and the man rushed to the deck below, shouting: "I have seen the face of the captain, and he smiled. All is well." The sight of that captain's smiling face averted panic and converted despair into hope.

If you are in trouble today, hear this: I know the captain. You know the captain. All will be well.



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