

03/01/2020

1 Lent

God in the wilderness,

God on the journey,

God of past, present and future ...

God goes with us, now and always. AMEN

We all know people who do things for an adrenaline rush. From sky diving, to snowmobiling, skiing on high mountain passes, driving 200 miles an hour, or mountain climbing. Most of the time, they are well qualified to do these things and have hours and hours of experience. **Most of the time**, they are very careful not to put other's lives at risk.

But some folks just do not think things through very well, or worse, don't care.

For example, take some skiers in Aspen, Co. not too long ago. Eager for extreme excitement, the skiers set out. Not knowing the area very well, they immediately got lost, and their plight led to a rescue effort which, the Los Angeles Times recalled, "included 12 snowmobiles, two Sno-Cats, two helicopters, two airplanes and a few dozen rescuers on skis - an exhaustive effort that thankfully, took no lives but cost about \$16,000."

Townpeople in Aspen were, to put it mildly, quite annoyed at the skiers, not the least, for going out in conditions that kept more level heads indoors. Then, when word got around that the rescued party was on the phone to Hollywood, offering the film rights to the story, things got ugly. The cost of rescuing the "Aspen Seven" was a good chunk of the local police budget; finding those two snowboarders provoked the district attorney to seek restitution, and a judge agreed.

According to the Coast Guard in Miami Fl, when a rescue effort requires the use of one of their helicopters, it costs them \$11,000 dollars an hour, and their largest search aircraft, the C-130, as much as \$20,000 dollars an hour to operate. Despite the cost, victims are rarely charged for any of this, even if they put themselves in unsafe situations that they had no business being in.

With the advent of GPS satellites and beacon locators, people tend to take more risks because, surely, they will be found. It has gotten to the point that we take being rescued for granted.

Today, a satellite-based phone system called Iridium provides wireless phone access anywhere on earth, from the sands of the Sahara to the rain forests of the Amazon to the wilds of the Arctic. The idea is that wherever you are, they can find you.

This morning, we have heard a lot of temptation and sin.

The over-adventurous athlete and the wayward sinner, both have some traits in common. Both have a large measure of self-confidence: We can go and do this on our own, because we're wearing the right kind of sports shoe or have the right gear, and in the case of sin; we think that we know what's right for ourselves, more than God does.

Also, there's some blindness to reality. Sure, the snow conditions are tough, but I'm tougher. Sure, temptation has its snares and stings and sin can scar one's soul, but not mine; I'm stronger than that. Perhaps it's not irony which compelled the writer of Proverbs to note that "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18).

I would not characterize Adam and Eve as risktakers. God had placed them in an environment that was safe, with plenty to eat and drink. We can readily assume that the weather must have been ideal since they did not need clothing. There was no concern about getting lost in the garden although we know that they tried to hide from God after eating of the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve would not have understood or realized the full effect that their actions would have on themselves and the generations who would follow. We can debate all day whether the story of Adam and Eve is just that, a story. But what is not debatable is the presence of Satan and Sin in the world. Just as with the first Man, sin is thinking that we know what is better for us than God does. We continually place ourselves in situations that we know are not safe. It is not that God isn't ready and able to help us, She is. We all make mistakes and need rescuing, but when we deliberately sin with the assumption that God will fix it later, **that is just reckless.**

The clear message of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is that while God goes to extremes seeking the lost, our neglect of his gift hardens our hearts and places us at the furthest point from God's attempt to rescue us. Again, It is not that God stops searching for us, it's that we hate to admit we're lost. So, we ignore the offer of rescue. Or perhaps, we feel that there is always plenty of time before we need to call on God to get us out of the fix, that we're in. Whatever our excuse, God is still eagerly searching for us. The story of the Prodigal Son is a great example.

Paul tells us; "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—" As with the Aspen 7, Adam and Eve had no intention of hurting others or an understanding of the far-reaching

consequences of their action. Should they have paid the price of a rescue operation for all of the generations to come? Maybe. But as we all know, someone eventually did.

“Therefore, just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all”.

The bottom line is that neither sportsman nor sinner can expect an unlimited time offer on being rescued. For the skiers who go out-of-bounds, somehow, they need to make their presence known, because eventually, even the most dogged rescuers will quit. For the sinner, death, sadly, ends the opportunity for salvation. Paul says in second Corinthians; "At an acceptable time, I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." (citing Isaiah 49.8).

In our reading this morning, Paul does not so much focus on the effects of sin and our tendency to put ourselves in situations of risk; but instead, focuses on humanity's universal need for Christ's redemptive act. Indeed, redemption is the true focus of Paul's discussion here - not sin and death. And we need to hear that. Sin is ever acceptable and it is very easy for our hearts to become hardened by all of the sin present in the world.

We are almost to the point of being numbed to the wickedness and death stalking our world. We watch the increasingly graphic and violent evening news each night. Is there anyone out there who can look at the events of the past 50 years and still make that claim that we are all good and are getting better and better?

It is not enough for the church to confess that we are a sinful selfish and short-lived people. There is no hope, no grace, no love in such a message. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is good news, a vision of the future, that can wipe away

the mists of tragedy and waves of evil crowding the edges of human existence. It is through the grace and love of our Creator God, that we are justified and brought to new life through the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross gives us the rose-tinted vision we need to see and walk clearly in this wicked world.

We need a Savior. The world needs a Savior. The planet needs a Savior to save it from human greed and selfishness. **We have a Savior. And that Savior is Jesus.**

“Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, * and whose sin is put away”.

AMEN