

21st Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – October 17, 2010

Based on 2Corinthians 1:8-11 written by Pastor Paul Horn

What can God do for you?

- I. He has delivered
- II. He will deliver

Millions of people from every corner of the globe watched with great anticipation, as one-by-one, 33 miners were drawn up a rescue shaft from 2,000 feet below the surface. Every single miner was received with thunderous applause and cheering, and popping of champagne bottles. Because... these miners had a death sentence... after 700,000 tons of rock had entombed them. If not for their supervisor rationing food, the diligent work of the rescue crew over the past 69 days, the well planned 22 hour rescue operation, and, most importantly, all under the watchful eye from God above, these men should be dead.

Our lesson this morning is from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Christians living in Corinth. In vs8-9 Paul mentions a similar situation that happened to him in Asia. The incident he refers to is when he was recently in Ephesus, a coastal city off the Aegean Sea. Ephesus was home to the great temple of Artemis, the goddess of fertility. A man by the name of Demetrius, a silversmith, was carefully watching the work of the Apostle Paul. One day he gathered the guild of craftsmen from the city and said to them, "This man is leading more and more citizens of Ephesus astray. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all! He threatens our job security." His speech riled up other guildsmen, which caused a riot of the entire city. The people dragged Paul's travel companions to the city theater and shouted for two hours straight. The situation would have gotten out of hand if not for the common sense of the city clerk who quieted them down and sent them all home. Because of this incident Paul was forced to leave the city. His life was at stake and it was not safe to do work of gospel there anymore. He would have to leave it in the hands of the laypeople.

Concerning that incident, Paul said that he despaired of life. We were certain we were going to die. He was under great pressure, even beyond our ability to endure. Why would God let him get to that point? "So that we may not rely on us but on God." And what does God do for Paul? He writes Vs10, "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril."

God has an excellent track record of delivering his people from certain death, doesn't he? Lot and his two daughters from destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Joseph from his brothers who wanted to kill him, and who can forget the greatest rescue operation ever undertaken, 2million people extracted from Egypt, after slavery and oppression for over 400 years. Last week in Sunday school the children learned about King Hezekiah and how he and Jerusalem were surrounded by the vast and more superior Assyrian army. If not for the LORD who sent his angel to kill 185,000 troops, they would have died. Queen Esther, whom the LORD used to deliver his people Israel from total annihilation in Persia... and we cannot fail to mention Daniel in the lions' den and his three friends in fiery furnace.

All of those people really should have died. There really was no escape. But God delivered them all from such a deadly peril. We see God's track record for delivering his people, and yet, why is it then that so often we rely on ourselves rather than trust in our Almighty God?

How many prefer driving to flying? Why is that? Statistically it is safer to fly than to drive. Think about it. Every morning and every evening the traffic reports accidents. Do you hear about that with airplanes? No. So why do many people prefer driving to flying? Because they feel better when they're in control. They would rather not entrust it into the hands of someone else, a trained, professional airplane pilot.

How many of you have situations or circumstances in your life that you are trying to control? The Soldier, who is still dealing with combat stress by himself/herself; the anxiety of a spouse over yet another deployment; a widow or widower who is dealing with the sobering reality that they are all alone, and they're trying to deal with the situation all by themselves? The parent who witnesses their child who has not followed the path of God, and they fear that they will fall back into the same bad crowd; a loved one is seriously ill; a job loss; the struggle with a certain sin, the guilt of sins past. Why are you saying, "God, I got this?"

No you don't. You don't have the capability. But yet you say, "Yes, I can handle it! After all, God says that he won't give me more than I can handle!" Paul penned those words from 1 Corinthians, and yet here today he admits, "I was beyond my ability to endure." Do you truly believe you can handle any and everything that comes your way? It comes down to this: do you fully and wholeheartedly trust Jesus or do you trust in yourself?

UPS has a clever advertising slogan – "What can brown do for you?" The color brown is used for all of their logos, uniforms, their vehicles, even their airplanes. It's clever because brown is the color of reliability. Colors have a psychological affect on the human brain. When the human eye sees that color, it emotes a sense of confidence and reliability in that product. But brown can't do everything for you, nor are they 100% reliable, neither are you.

So instead, let's ask the question, "What can God do for you?" Well, let's look again at God's track record. What has he done for his children? What did he do for his own Son when he despaired of life? The Son of God was given a sure and certain death sentence, with no appeal, no last minute pardon from the governor, and he knew it. He was given this death sentence because the Father had made a judge's ruling that all must die for their sins, a death sentence we surly deserve for relying on ourselves, for not trusting wholly in God, a judgment we could never bear, a burden that strikes the very core of our being.

Yet, Father applied the judgment on his Son instead of you and me. As he hung on the cross, crying out in pain, questioning his Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" What did Father do? Come to rescue his son? No. He allows him to carry the judgment out to its finality. He leaves him hanging on the cross so that he dies. Is that a picture of reliability on the part of our God? Absolutely! For by not rescuing his Son from sure and certain

death, he provides life for you. By not pardoning his Son, he pardons you of all your sins. Because he did not rescue his Son from death on a cross, he kept his promise to save you from death. The 33 miners were so overjoyed and grateful for being delivered from a mine after only two months trapped. Do we not know even greater joy and happiness having been delivered from a more powerful entrapment?

I'm sure you've seen how the rescue workers pulled the 33 Chilean miners out from 2,000 feet below the surface - a narrow cylinder shaped device named The Phoenix Two. This tried and true rescue capsule, designed by NASA, used once already in the United States, will undoubtedly be used for future mine disasters. We have a tried and true rescue capsule. It's God himself. Does not our knowledge of his past reliability not also give us even greater confidence for the future? Paul said, "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us, he will continue to deliver us." The Lord God had rescued Paul from certain death in that riot in Ephesus. Paul was convinced that God would do the same for him in the future.

Since God has rescued us from death, will we not also put our whole trust in him? After all, he is the one who raises the dead. In the Old Testament, he raised the Shunammite woman's son through Elisha, he had raised Lazarus. He raised the son of the widow of Nain. He raised his Son from death. By his resurrection Jesus has given you new life. A new life that trusts God... that because of his resurrection he will deliver you from all things.

Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, "On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." Isn't that what prayer is all about? Whether we pray for ourselves or when for each other, just like the Corinthians were praying for Paul, prayer takes me out of the situation and puts control into God's hands. Prayer fully trusts that God will act.

What can God do for you? He tells you in Psalm 50:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me." But, oftentimes the way I define deliverance may be very different from the way God defines deliverance. A loved one undergoes major surgery. We entrust our loved one's life to God's care through prayer. The surgery is a success! And then, a twist... the loved one dies days later. God didn't answer your prayers, did he? He didn't rescue your loved one from death! But he did.

When we pray, "Deliver us from evil," we are asking our Father in Heaven, to first of all, keep all evil from us, secondly, that if he allows evil to come into our lives, that he would give us the strength to stand up in spite of the evil. When we ask him to save a life, to take away the pain and suffering and grief, to take away guilt over sins, he promises he will, but his way of accomplishing it may take longer than we'd like, or in a way we weren't anticipating, but he promises that he will deliver you. He's done it before, he will do it again.

Finally, in 2Timothy 4 the apostle Paul writes, **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack, and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.”** Ultimately, God delivers you from every evil when he takes you home to heaven. There you will have eternal rest from evil, pain and suffering, but most importantly, that through death, he delivered his child from spiritual evil, that being an eternity in hell, to eternal joys in heaven.

This is God’s promise to you. Whatever may come your way, sickness, disease, death, guilt, anxiety of life, they come for a reason, **“So that we do not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.”** What can God do for you? Tell him. Ask him. And see what happens. Amen.