

CHAOS

John 2:13-22

Intro

The following event is one that, regardless of how familiar you are with the stories contained in scripture, feels out of step with the picture that is cast for Jesus.

To help illustrate my point, let's do a quick word association. Responding with one word, what immediately comes to mind when I say the following: Jesus? Love. Savior. Forgiver. Sacrifice. Strong. Humble. Welcoming.

I'm right there with you, which is why it's so important to have those perspectives balanced with the reaction that we are about to hear.

The way that John sets the story up, this event takes place toward the beginning of Jesus three year ministry (as opposed to the last few days as is recorded in the other gospel accounts). Regardless of when it took place, what it showed is that the passion that Jesus had for his Heavenly Father, the worship that had become the vehicle through which people approached the Father, and the individuals who came before the Father was intense and there were times when that intensity could not be confined by the expectations of the world...and yes, that means that there were times when life started feeling a little upside down. The scripture reads this way.

John 2:13-22

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

I Corinthians 1:18-25

Intro

Our second passage takes the reality that was displayed through the sort of actions that we just were reminded about, and puts it into an easily digestible theological thought.

And that's good.

Until we start to understand that what has become easily digestible in terms of its concept, means a reality that can be a whole lot more...chaotic.

With that said, do you believe that God is able to abide with you in your chaos? The scripture reads this way.

I Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

'Chaos'

I don't know about you, but the last six weeks have been so relaxing that I swear that others may refer to them as a vacation, or at the very least a sabbatical.

No? Not buying that?

Yeah. So, there was a moment two and a half weeks ago, as Jen and I were sitting in Austin's PICU room down at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia when we started thinking about the last month and change.

The last 45 days have contained the following: Jen, Amanda, and Eric leaving on a mission trip to the Virgin Islands, Jim and I recognizing that he's coming down with a cold...and put him into quasi-quarantine in his room, Jen breaks her wrist during the first morning of work down in St. Thomas, the mission trippers return, a visit to the orthopedist in Morristown, a visit to the anesthesiologist in Philadelphia, a wrist surgery that included the placement of a plate and 10 screws (meaning that Jen is not able to pick up anything with her right arm heavier than a gallon of milk), a painful recovery that was made harder because of a poorly placed splint on that wrist, a follow up appointment with the orthopedist, a week of trying to keep Austin free from any illness, a scheduled surgery down a CHOP...where we were discharged the next day...before returning that night via ambulance because Austin was struggling to breathe...upon which he was readmitted and spent 4 days in the PICU (two and a half of those days Austin was not allowed to eat as he received all sorts of meds to get his breathing back to normal), which was followed up by a regular at home infusion, four PT appointments (two of those were for Jen), several shortened days of school as Austin built his stamina back up, and then the joy of mother nature hitting us with a couple of storms and the corresponding power outages (we actually hosted my brother, niece, and nephew on Thursday as where they are at in PA was going to be a while before they got power back.).

I put that out there not looking for any sympathy (as I know that there are others who are able to go toe to toe with the stuff we have been dealing with), but rather to provide a context for the following statement: the presence and the movement of God have been with us.

Now I know that there would be quite a few people who would look at our last month and think (much like was thought of Job in the Old Testament), 'I wonder what they did wrong?'

But life as we know it is not set up as a, 'you know who did something wrong in their life because their life is a struggle' equation.

Bad stuff happens to good people. Good stuff happens to bad people. People who are out for themselves are able to experience extended times of peace and tranquility. People who give of themselves to others can struggle with simply too much of everything. Those over simplifications, the inverse thereof, and everything in-between: the world as we know it is chaotic.

And it is because of that fact that I am extremely grateful for passages like we have this morning that show and articulate for us that the wisdom, presence, and power of God do not necessarily move in ways that 'make sense'. The love of Jesus can be felt through his righteous indignation in the midst of the temple courtyard, through his loving and forgiving words to sinful individuals who are willing to repent, and through his sacrificial death on a cross, a sacrifice that we are able to remember again this morning through this meal of communion.

The world can be chaotic; it might not make any sense; and the presence and power of God are able to move in and through it in abundant ways.

Let me touch upon a few examples that my family has been able to have, affirming that reality in the midst of the last 45 days.

Yes, Jen did fall and break her wrist, and the exact right people who needed to be there to care for her were there, from Emily putting her RN skills to use on her day off ('Nurse!'), to the minister down there coming into the ER to take Jen over to an orthopedist (who happens to be a member of the church where they were staying), to a nurse being willing and able to rewrap Jen's surgically repaired wrist in the back of our van in the parking lot of the hospital (yup, that happened).

Yes, Austin did have surgery, and we were able to learn, among other things, that he really shouldn't be able to hear as well as he does, and that there is a device that may be able to help him hear even more clearly. We did have to go to the ER with Austin but we had the exact right EMT tell us that of our hospital choices, Hunterdon would be the best, because they would get him stabilized...so that he could get back to Philly where the resources were readily available. People checking in, bringing a meal, sending the largest smiley face balloon we have ever seen, and leaving a 'Welcome Home' poster on the door, have bolstered us in those days when we are still feeling exhausted whether that be emotionally and absolutely physically. I've mentioned the mission trip hangover before (where it's a struggle to reenter into your 'regular' life because it feels like there are other things that you should be focused on)...it's a variation of that feeling. We've been dealing with that, and we've been supported in quite a few ways as we do.

Again, all of the stuff that's a struggle is still there. Jen still can't pick Austin up, Austin is still having his stamina built back up, physical therapy still hurts, and power outages are exhausting.

Our life is hard, physically, emotionally. It is. To whitewash that away and make everything sound happy, happy would be...wrong. But,...

Our life has been chaotic and we have felt that in some very pointed ways over the last few weeks...and God's presence has been recognized (and that's just the ways that we've taken notice of!). It may not make sense or fit into a worldly paradigm that is calculable. And it is still held by God.

All the emotions.

All the positive.

All the negative.

God's weakness is stronger than any human strength. I lean upon that reminder. I lean upon that truth. I invite you to do the same as you move through your journey, and yes, that is regardless of how you may see the landscape of your current days.

God's weakness is stronger than any human strength...and he holds us all. His passion for us, for you, is that great. Look to the table to be reminded of that reality. He is with you...even today.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, Your passion for each of us is unable to be fully comprehended...and maybe that's why there are many days when we struggle to believe that its real, that it's for us. But Lord, Your wisdom is greater than anything we might be able to construct and Your weakness is greater than our strength. Move in us to lean upon You and know that this is true now, even today as difficult as it may be, and forevermore. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.