

Oct 30 2022

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Immediately - On Second Thought

Matthew 14:22 ff

“Immediately (Jesus) made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After that, he climbed a mountain by himself to pray. That night a storm battered the disciple’s boat while they were out in the middle. But in the morning, (Jesus) came toward them walking on the water. They were terrified and cried, “It’s a ghost!” But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.”

Peter answered, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ (Jesus) said, “Come”. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water toward Jesus, but the wind started kicking up and Peter became frightened and began to sink. Jesus immediately reached out and caught him, saying ‘O Ye of little faith...’

“Immediately” - could there be a better word in all of scripture to help us celebrate First Responders Sunday? There is no sooner “First Response” humanly possible than “immediately”.

And we give heartfelt thanks
to our ambulance and rescue crews,
our fire departments, law enforcement officers
and our road crews
for answering the call for help as immediately
as they do.

The Greek word in the bible for “immediately” is *eutheos*. It means instantaneous, without hesitation, forthwith. Most of the time it is a writing-style word used to enhance the miracles of Jesus. Such as he healed someone “immediately”, he calmed a storm “immediately”, he banished an evil spirit “immediately”.

And when it comes to our 1st Responders, let us not lose sight of the miraculousness of their efforts. I harken back to a phrase by the late great Henri Nouwen who said, “**Ministry is interruption**”. And I think of all the family dinners, the sound-sleep at midnight, the sporting events of their children that were interrupted in order to save a life or a home,

and I say, “Bravo” -
thank God for your ministry of immediately.

But wonder with me about the ministry of immediately
in our society.

Think about bureaucracies. Think about insurances.
Think about our legal system, governmental red-tape.
Think about the military.

I know we need organizations - but do we need to
worship them as much as we do?

Because, so often, they slow down
the ministry of immediately and discourage
those most in need from reaching out
and asking for help!

One of the things I most admire about our church
is our ability to respond immediately to people in need.
And the more churches go part-time, have locked doors,
and only focus on Sunday-morning worship
the more the ministry of immediately suffers.

But that is not my main focus this morning.

I want to focus on the **spirituality of immediately**.

Because I think our bible lesson wants us to.

As I said, the Greek word for immediately is “eutheos”.

In the New Testament it occurs 79 times.

In the Old Testament it occurs only 5.

Clearly, Christian scripture wants us to explore our spirituality of immediately.

And this morning's bible reading especially does.

It is one of the few times that "immediately" occurs 3xs in the SAME story.

What is it trying to tell us?

We'll think about this.

"Immediately" has a powerful truth to tell us about ourselves.

What we do "immediately" speaks to our instinct.

How we react "immediately" is us being at our most unfiltered and uncensored and unconsidered.

Our bible story suggests to us that

"immediately" is where the truth of our faith gets tested,

and where we, like the disciple Peter,

are judged, "O Ye of little faith" or not.

Look at the details.

That night a storm battered the disciple's boat while they were out in the middle. But in the morning, (Jesus) came toward them walking on the water. They were terrified and cried, "It's a ghost!" But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

Then later,

(Jesus) said, "Come". So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water toward Jesus, but the wind started kicking up and Peter became frightened and began to sink. Jesus immediately reached out and caught him, saying 'O Ye of little faith...'

In both situations we see the disciples "immediately" being exposed.

That is the case for most of us.

Many people live according to their immediately.

They RE-act instead of pro-act.

They resort to their default emotion, their natural state of mind, their unplanned, unconsidered self.

Fear, anger, retaliation, greed, escape, pride, denial, this is just a short list of people's "immediate" reactions.

What does your "immediately" tell you about yourself?

Many times my immediately is self-defense.

When criticized I get defensive.

I see my mistakes in glaring clarity,
my successes - not so much.

This type of "immediately" can magnify conflict in a marriage, in the work-place and certainly in politics.

In a couple weeks we will be voting for our national leaders.

Have you considered analyzing candidates according to their “Immediately”?

Our Gospel story this morning suggests we do.

In other words, before we follow someone, we should consider who they are uncensored, unfiltered unvarnished?

I know it’s hard because so many politicians are programmed by focus groups, spin-doctors and party loyalty.

And the history of campaigns has been judgmental.

Remember Edmund Musky,

whose presidential aspirations ended when he cried?

And can we ever forget Jimmy Carter’s candor

“I lusted in my heart”?

And our own Gov. Dean’s presidential hopes

came to a screeching halt

after he screamed like a banchey.

As our bible story suggests,

people sink or swim in relation to their “immediately”.

For more than a decade I did chaplaincy work in a county jail.

And one thing I noticed was how so many of them

were there because of their lack of impulse control.

They were victims of their own immediately.
But when it comes to nuclear weapons,
a single person's "immediately" can wipe out the world.

But the bottom-line of our bible story this morning
doesn't end with our "immediately".
It celebrates what comes AFTER IT.
In two instances where the word "immediately" occurs
it is followed by the name "Jesus".
*But immediately Jesus - Jesus spoke, saying,
"Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."*

And then later,
*"The wind started kicking up
and Peter became frightened and began to sink.
Immediately, Jesus - Jesus reached out & caught him.*

Our Lord wants to remedy our immediately.
Our Lord wants to rescue us from our immediately-s,
Our Lord wants to become OUR SECOND THOUGHT
as immediately as possible.

Think about Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mt."
Recall his 6 antitheses;
When he taught "Don't swear",
"But I say unto you: let your yes be yes and your no be no".

When he taught “Don’t retaliate and live by an ethic of eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth.”

“But I say unto you - turn the other cheek.”

When he taught “Don’t act upon your anger”,

“But I say unto you - come to terms with your accuser.”

When he taught, “Don’t love just your neighbor”.

“But I say unto you - love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.”

In all of these teachings, Jesus’ is trying to make himself the 2nd-Thought to all his disciple’s “immediately-s”

Likewise, each of his teachings are meant to push us to live by our second thoughts - not our first ones - and to make those second thoughts begin with Jesus!

In closing, the older I get the more I realize almost nothing I do is immediately anymore.

I’ve really slowed down.

Much of that is due to aches and pains.

But our Lord prays our slow-down is about more than aches and pains .

He wants us slow down from living by our immediately and be guided by our second thought

which he hopes is himself and his teachings.

So I guess, in a manner of speaking
Jesus wishes to become the 1st-responder
to our 1st response!

Prayer of Pastoral Care October 30, 2022

Psalm 85 proclaims, "God speaks peace to the faithful, to those who turn to God in their hearts." Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying, Save us, O God, **we come to you.**

God of favor and purpose. You are with us in our deepest pain, fear, and bewilderment. You hear our cry when others sometimes turn a deaf ear and a cold heart. You lift us from the depths of discouragement and walk with us through the troubles of our lives. We come to you with confidence on behalf of the church, the world, and all in need. Save us, O God, **we come to you.**

We pray for all your family, O God; for our sisters and brothers who belong to you throughout the world; who call on you by different names. We pray for interfaith councils joined in mission to the needs of others; creating dialogue and understanding, and shared appreciation in worship and community. Save us, O God, **we come to you.**

We pray that as churches and individuals, we may be willing to work for justice and the dignity of all persons. Hear our prayers for peace and order to permeate your creation, responding to your commands. We pray for renewed efforts to embody faithful stewardship of the earth's resources, that we may act more forcefully against climate change today and for generations to come. Save us, O God, **we come to you.**

During this election season, we pray for all affected by violence and threats of violence in our country, much of it based on erroneous assumptions. In the midst of our divisions, may we find ways to work together in our nation for the common well-being and respect of everyone. We ask for your power and love to overwhelm the chaos of nations. Grant endurance to the people in Ukraine, facing the war's devastation against homes and civilian infrastructure heading into winter. Give us faith and courage to follow Christ so closely that divisions are dismantled, reconciliation is accomplished, and love casts out all fear. Save us, O God, **we come to you.**

Hear us, as we bring before you those on this church's immediate needs list.

Son of God, you walk on the waters of turmoil to meet us in the midst of your purpose for our lives. Help us to recognize your presence, remember your promise, rely on your power, and receive your peace through every storm. Amen.

OFFERING Christ has freely given us the gift of grace and salvation. Let us therefore, freely offer our generous gifts of gratitude to him.

*DOXOLOGY & *DEDICATION Generous God, we thank you for your call and claim upon our lives. We pray that our faith will increase; that our practice of generosity will be enlarged; and that our joy in believing will encourage others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.