

Message for October 2, 2022

Communion

Matthew 11:25-30

I am beginning this message by playing my own version of the game “Password”, but if you guess the answer to the clues you do not have to jump up and there isn’t a prize for getting it right either! The clues are: The William Tell Overture. Who was that masked man? Hi-Ho Silver! Tonto! I am sure that by now many, if not most of you, have guessed that the answer is “The Lone Ranger”.

The Lone Ranger is a fictional hero of the American West who first appeared in 1933 as the main character in radio plays. The radio shows were very popular during the dark days of the Depression. Then, when television came along, the Lone Ranger made the jump to that medium and had his own TV show throughout most of the 1950’s. The Lone Ranger was also featured on the silver screen as the principal character in a number of movies, the most recent of which was released in 2013. As the character was so popular there was also all sorts of merchandise associated with him including comic books, games and so on.

The basic storyline for most of the adventures of the Lone Ranger is almost invariably the same. There is a problem that the authorities, either because they are inept or corrupt, cannot deal with. The Lone Ranger hears about it, rides into town on his white horse, and then makes things right. If that means that he has to step on people’s toes, bend the rules or even break them, he does. That however doesn’t really matter since he is the good guy serving the greater good. Of course, he sometimes needs help and that is where his faithful sidekick, the Native-American, Tonto comes in. Inevitably the problem is solved, the bad guys get their just reward, and the Lone Ranger rides out of town off to his next adventure.

Truly the Lone Ranger is one of the most iconic figures in 20th century pop culture and he is *the* classic American folk hero. Not surprisingly, he is also the example or model for so many heroes since. In fact all we have to do is think of many of the heroes portrayed in the movies and on the TV shows that we watch. There is a problem that the police, the government or whomever else can’t deal

with and then the hero, with a complete disregard of the rules and laws, deals with it and puts everything right.

Not surprisingly, this has carried over into the 'real' world. A business is in trouble and then the search begins for a CEO who will come in and solve the issues and problems facing the company. In the world of politics, we look for a hero all the time who will make everything right. This is even true in the church; a concern of many interim-moderators is that when congregations are searching for a new minister they are looking for a 'saviour' who will single-handedly solve all their problems. In fact this sort of thinking has even crept into our understanding of God and our relationship with him.

This past week I read an article about prayer and in it the author noted that we pray for many different reasons. We pray for example to praise God, thank God, and confess our sins. The author however noted that most of our prayers are intercessory in nature; whether it be for ourselves or someone else, we pray that God will ensure that something will or will not happen. Now there is of course nothing wrong with such prayers as God wants us to take our cares, worries and concerns to him. The problem though is that for so many of us, this is the only theme of our prayers and the only reason we pray. As he noted, sometimes our prayers read like a long list of requests and almost sound like a shopping list, but of course there is nothing new in this. A well-known poet of years gone by, W. H. Auden, wrote this tongue-in-cheek prayer.

"Leave Thy heavens and come down to our earth of waterclocks and hedges. Become our Uncle. Look after Baby, amuse Grandfather, escort Madam to the Opera, help Willy with his homework, introduce Muriel to a handsome naval officer. Be interesting ... and we will love you as we love ourselves."

There is a serious point behind this poem. So often when we turn to God in prayer, it is solely to make requests for God to take care of something that we cannot. Our hope and even expectation is that he will make everything right. To put it another way, we expect God to ride into our lives so-to-speak on a white charger, take care of our problem, and then ride off into the sunset, not to be seen again until the next time that we need him. And if God does this, then and perhaps only then, will we love him as we love ourselves. This is what we often want but this is not what we always get. We may want a Lone Ranger but instead we get Jesus, and Jesus doesn't always make all of our problems go

away. Instead, he joins us sharing the load, offering us his support and comfort. Jesus did not say “come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will make all of your troubles go away”. Rather he said, “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest”.

Christ gives us the rest, the strength, and the peace that only he can give that enables us to face our issues head on. He does this in many different ways too, but one of the greatest is through the sacrament that we are now about to celebrate. Amongst so many other things, communion is the visible, tangible expression of God’s presence and working in our lives and in the life of the world around us. When things aren’t going well or as we expected, we may long for the Lone Ranger to ride into our lives to the stirring sound of the William Tell Overture, but this is not what we necessarily get. God in his wisdom doesn’t necessarily give us what we want; rather he gives us what we need, and that is himself. And there is no greater reminder or expression of his presence, love, support, and working in our lives than what we will now celebrate.

Pastoral Prayer

Hear us now as we offer you our praise and thanks this autumn morning. We give you thanks for the beautiful and awesome wonder of this season of change. We thank you not just for the beauty of your creation, but also for its goodness as it fulfills so many of our needs. Help us we pray, to love your good creation and care for it as you do.

We thank you for the very nature that is you. Sometimes we lose sight of who you are and what you are: God Almighty, the Beginning and the End. You are so far removed from us and yet, you are still so near to us. You love us, you redeem us, and you even became one of us in the person of your Son. For this we thank you, and we thank you too that what you did two thousand years ago in the flesh, you still do today in the Spirit. Open our senses and our minds so that we might discern you at work in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the world beyond. Help us to remember that while we may sometimes long for a ‘superhero’ to solve all of our problems, you offer us what we truly need and that is your presence alongside us as we make our way on life’s journey.

We pray for your presence in the lives of the people in our Atlantic provinces as they continue to come to grip with the destruction caused by Hurricane Fiona. We pray too for the people in Cuba and Florida as they come to grip with the destruction caused by Hurricane Ian.

We pray for your presence and working in Ukraine. We especially pray for the people in the occupied regions of that country after the sham referendum this past week, resulting in an even greater rise in tensions, lessening the prospect for peace.

As we look towards next week's long weekend, we pray that we may not lose sight of what that weekend is really all about. We pray as well for the safety and well-being of all as people mark the last long weekend of the year.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen