

## Our Hope and Our Salvation

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Rescuers digging through the ruins of a building and pulling out survivors after the earthquake. Emergency personnel helping a family out of a flooded building into a boat to take them to safety. A helicopter crew airlifting a homeowner from a rooftop as the waves crash into their home.

The scenes from the recent disasters in Haiti, the gulf coast, and the eastern seaboard are dramatic. Communities shattered in an instant because of an earthquake, a hurricane, or a massive flood. People staring in disbelief next to the ruins of their homes, workplaces, and churches. And of course the expressions of relief when rescuers come to save them from the destruction, the devastation, and the danger.

And even if we have never personally been in the terrifying situation, we can understand the need and the importance of the relief efforts. For the emergency workers and volunteers pull people from the the collapsed buildings, out of the devastation, and from the peril of the rising waters and bring them to safety. And even when I describe the scenes we can all feel the relief and the hope when those in peril realize they have not been abandoned to the disaster but help has arrived.

This morning's gospel lesson is Peter's profession of faith. The text begins with Jesus asking the disciples a simple question "Who do people say that I am?" And the disciples answer John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the other prophets. Which basically is them saying people think Jesus is a good person, a wise person, and a holy person. And then Jesus asks the more important question "And who do you say that I am?" And Peter answers "You are the Messiah." And while there is a great deal else that happens in our lesson I want to focus in on Peter's response.

For the truth is that we hear Peter's words and we agree that Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ. But what Peter is professing is not merely that Jesus is special in the sense he is good or wise or holy but that Jesus is the one sent by God to save the world.

By calling Jesus the Messiah Peter is saying that Jesus is good in the way that God is good. Not merely being nice but being a person whose goodness transforms and shapes the world around him. That Jesus is wise in the way that God is wise. Not

simply understanding things like smart people do but seeing and knowing the basic and important truths of life. And that Jesus is holy in the way that God is holy. For he is not only close to God but his life, his words, his actions, show God to the world. For Peter professes that Jesus is the Saviour, the one sent by God to free and liberate the people.

And again we may nod and agree that Jesus is the Saviour. Yet the power of knowing Jesus is the Messiah is not in our understanding but in how that reality impacts our life. For Jesus comes to save us from the situations and circumstances, to save us from the things we can do nothing about and are powerless to overcome. Like the people in the earthquake, and the hurricane, and the flooding we need someone in our lives to help us, to rescue us, to take us from where we are to safety.

Because as much as we would like to think and pretend that we can do it all and take care of ourselves the truth is that we can't. There are things we face in life, there are situations and times and circumstances when our lives spin out of control, when our hopes and dreams and certainty are shattered, where everything falls apart. And we are powerless, we are trapped, we cannot save ourselves.

And into the despair, the pain, hopelessness God answers us in the person of Jesus Christ. Who shows us first and foremost that God remembers us, cares for us, and comes to us in our need. For God does not forget us in our pain and sorrow but meets us with the reality of salvation. God comes to free us from the sins which trap us and crush us, God comes to lead us from the destruction and fear which surround us, God comes to lift us from the rising waters of death to offer us new life and new possibility.

For saying "You are the Messiah" is not merely a profession of who Jesus is but a statement of faith about what God is doing through Jesus. A powerful statement that God has not forsaken but is embracing us in our need. That God does not look upon us in our weakness and turn away but that God comes to be with us in that need to offer us not merely relief but hope. A powerful profession of faith, a life changing statement of who Jesus is and what he can and will do for you, for me, and for our world. For his death upon the cross and his rising from the grave are not accidents or historical footnotes but the core of the good news which God shows the world through him.

And I don't know about you but I need a Saviour. Now. For my life. So that I can face this world and all the things that terrify me, worry me, and press in on me. So that I understand that when I am powerless I am not lost or alone but can know the promise of God's love the touch of forgiveness and the transformation of grace itself. For that is who Jesus is and what Jesus comes to do. He comes to save us. Save us when the world goes crazy and we can do nothing about it. Save us from our failures and flaws. Save us from the disasters which overwhelm us.

And that in and of itself is wonderful, encouraging, and exhilarating. But that isn't all that Peter is saying when he claims that Jesus is the Messiah. For the promise of the Saviour isn't merely that he will rescue us from the dangers we are facing. Not only that he will free us from what traps us and holds us back. But also that he will create through us and for us something new, something better, something which God has always intended for us.

Because the rescue from the collapsed building, the evacuation from the rising waters is only part of what the people in peril need. Yes, first and foremost they need to be saved from the immediate danger in their lives. But they also need somewhere to rest, to be safe as they start to face what has happened and start to come to terms with what needs to be done. And that is also what Jesus offers us as Saviour. The way for us to come to God and know peace, be safe, and find healing and hope. And then, when we are safe from the storm of life, when we have had a chance to accept that more is possible, we are shown the way to build a new life.

For salvation is not simply about being rescued from the immediate danger and trouble. It is not merely strength when we are weak and peace when we are troubled. It is also the way to something better starting now and continuing in the days and week and years to come.

For Jesus comes not simply to save us from what is happening today but to show us what God intends and what God wants and what God is bringing about in the days to come. For it is wonderful to be rescued from danger, incredible to be safe and have that pause amidst our troubles. But ultimately what Jesus comes to do is to bring us back to God. So that the salvation is not only for the moment we are in need but becomes part of our lives this day and all of our days.