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Transfiguration Sunday Yr. A
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Matthew 17: 1 – 9
2 Peter 1: 16 – 21

“Get Up and Do Not Be Afraid”

Danger Story

Have you ever been scared to death? Fifteen years ago, when I was pastoring in the North Indiana conference at a church within the shadow of Notre Dame’s golden dome, nobody had a cell phone.

So it was fortunate that Mark Kurowski, the church’s youth director, reached me at home on a snowy January morning.

When I picked up the phone Mark’s voice was several decibels higher than usual—frantic might be a good description.

“You need to get over here right now!” he said, and then he said, “But it might be dangerous!”

“What’s the matter?” I asked

“It’s the boiler. Something is wrong with the boiler! Its making this horrible noise and it smells bad in here.”

We had the kind of talk you would expect: Had he called the trustees—Yes, He said he’d tried to get a hold of a couple of trustees and only found one at home who didn’t seem to understand the seriousness of the situation.

The man told Mark to calm down, and no he wasn’t coming over there—they had a big family affair they were getting ready for. And besides the boiler had a safety switch that would turn it off if the water got too low. This octogenarian clearly thought this 20 year old kid was over blowing the whole thing.

I said I’d be right over. When I opened the door of the church it smelled just like a kettle gone dry on a hot stove. And it was like tropical--humid—steam was coming out of the heater vents.

Water vapor had condensed on the walls of the lobby area which was papered with a kind of embossed, satin pale green stripe and droplets were forming and beginning to run in little driblets down the indentations. I thought, so WHEN does this safety switch turn the boiler off?

Mark grabbed me in relief, talking a mile a minute repeatedly saying he was afraid the boiler was going to blow up!

He had been down stairs and heard the boiler making this awful noise and peered in there and the temperature gage was all the way to the top and steam was coming out of the boiler.

Now I had been in this boiler room. I knew there was a switch to turn it off—but the boiler room was long and low and the boiler took up the majority of the space, closer to one wall than the other.

But, as Murphy would have it, the switch was located on the wall the boiler was closest to, at the back of the room.

The only way to get to it was to inch past the boiler and around behind it and reach the back of the boiler to the switch.

Obviously the Cavalry were not coming. We didn’t want to blow up the back half of the sanctuary building. Or did we? The church could use some remodeling.... But I really didn’t know what insurance would cover.

So I said to Mark, “Well, we have to turn it off.” He looked at me like I had holes in my head and started pushing me back toward the door, saying, “NO! O no!” I said, “Now Mark, it’ll only take a minute to get in there and turn it off.” And I headed for the stairs leading to the basement.

As we descended the stairwell, the steaminess increased and the asbestos tiled floor was damp and slippery. With every step the banging was growing louder and more frequent.

By now I was having second thoughts. My own heart was beating so loudly I could barely hear Mark and the banging was terrific.

Mark said, “I can’t go in there and you CAN’T go in there!” Fear ran through me. This

was real. This thing could really blow up. It was bigger than me.

I told him and myself “It’ll only take a minute.” Whereupon he threw himself down on his knees in front of me and began to pray at the top of his lungs, ‘O Jesus, dear Jesus, save Pastor Denice, Please., Lord, don’t let us be killed, don’t let the boiler blow up.”

At that point time just kind of stood still. I was light headed and it was like I was outside my body watching this whole thing happen.

I peeled off my gloves, muffler, overcoat, boots and sweater so I’d be more agile—not to mention so I wouldn’t pass out from the heat and steam.

With Mark vocalizing to the Lord, I began to inch my way past the boiler-- talking to myself every step of the way, praying silently, thinking of my two young children and my husband; realizing that if the boiler did blow it wouldn’t hurt because I wouldn’t know what hit me—it’d be over in an instant.

I realized I was petrified with fear but I kept moving. I got to the back wall and the steam and heat were bad.

I turned toward the other wall and I couldn’t make out where the switch was, but I knew it was there so I just reached over a portion of the boiler pipes and began to feel along the bricks and there —o the relief was tremendous--- was the switch. Flip! And it was off.

The banging began to diminish immediately.

The next thing I remember I am lying on the wet tile out in the hall breathing like a freight train and Mark is dancing around the hall shouting, “Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus!”. Then he walks over to me gives me his hand , and he says with tremendous relief in his voice, “Get up –it’s over! You did it! It’s okay!!”

I sat up and with the dampness all around me I realized we needed to open the doors and windows and turn on the fans in the sanctuary so things would dry out.

We worked our way through the building and when at last we reached the doors and went outside—the cold dry blast of winter air was a welcome hit. We sat down on the snow covered step and didn’t speak for several minutes.

I mean life was so normal out there! The world was completely oblivious to our little hair raising drama. Cars were driving by. The man across the street was shoveling his walk. It was like we were survivors from a science fiction action thriller. Privy to a dangerous threat to which the world was blissfully unaware.

Another Danger Story:

The Dangerous Divine

Six days after Jesus tells his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer and be killed, he takes Peter and James and his brother John and leads them up a mountain.

Climbing higher and higher, each man falls silent. The recollection of Jesus words rising anxiously inside.

Once they reach the summit some very unexpected and out right incredible things occur — Jesus is “transfigured” before them, his face radiating a bright light and his clothing shining bright.

Then there are appearances of two revered, long dead prophets speaking with him: Elijah and Moses.

And no sooner do these curious visions occur than a bright cloud descends on the scene obscuring everything and a voice speaks from heaven. The voice of God! “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am pleased: listen to him!”

Fear coursing through them, the disciples fall on their faces. A moment later, the cloud has disappeared, Jesus comes over, and touching each one says, “Get up, it’s over. Don’t be afraid.” Everything is back to normal.

But back down the mountain the rest of the disciples, and the rest of the world have no idea what’s happened on that mountain—they

are completely oblivious to the danger—the danger of the Divine.

We forget how big God is. We forget how other God is. We are used to God with skin on: Jesus. We are used to picturing divinity in our own human image. To conversing with a Savior who is a friend, a Good Shepherd. A very approachable God. The Son of God who walked over and touched each man and said reassuringly, “Don’t be afraid.”

The fact is the God present in Jesus is a force beyond our reckoning or reasoning or understanding.

This is the Divine power central to the universe itself—the power of life and of death—so much greater than our analogies which trivialize the immense difference between creature and Creator- as an ant to an elephant or a person to a super nova.

What the disciples feel in not just the kind of fear that Mark and I felt with the broken boiler booming away—

--No, this is the kind of fear that is witless with awe at the overwhelming realization of the reality of the Divine. As we make our way to the cross ,to the playing out of the depravity the human animal is capable of in the brutality of Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion—

--we need to look back to this few moments of transfiguring, volcanically explosive power revealed on this mountain.

This voice of Divine power commanding us to listen and to follow him. This power that is so much larger than any power of nature or any human power. Larger than any human evil— or human limitations...

And take heart and shudder. Quake in our boots. Because this power is not to be denied.

We need to remember that as we enter into Lent...the power of God is not to be denied!

We need to allow our fear to overcome us enough that when we feel Jesus walk over and touch us and say to us , “Don’t be afraid,” we will cling to his words with great relief and great thanksgiving---and believe him with every fiber of

our being because we understand clearly what there is to fear and know that when Jesus tells us:

“Don’t be afraid,” these are words of great good news. Words that assure us that whatever happens to us—the worst is over—because of the power of God.

So don’t be afraid!. Because there is nothing to fear. God has already chosen. God has chosen for all of us.

May the transfiguring power of God and the comforting words of Jesus arouse a reverence within us that permits us to marvel.

Marvel in humility, marvel in thanksgiving and marvel in great joy at the realization that this power we name God loves us, forgives us, desires to be close to us....seeks us out.... and indeed, chooses to suffer for us---stoops to conger to salvage us-- to GIVE us life----eternal life---*rather than blast us out of the universe.*