

It is not easy being a father. One cynic, speaking from his own experience, noted that children go through four fascinating stages. First they call you DaDa. Then they call you Daddy. As they mature they call you Dad. Finally they call you collect.

The most common image that Jesus used in describing God was that of "Father." It makes me think that Joseph must have been a very special kind of father. We center much of our attention on his mother, Mary, but Joseph must have also combined those very special qualities of strength and gentleness that we associate with Jesus. Jesus had a very keen knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the Jewish home it was the father who had the primary responsibility for his son's religious instruction. Of course we know that Jesus had an unique relationship with God. Still, I have to believe that Joseph, though barely mentioned in the Gospel narrative, was probably an influential role model for Jesus. Why else would Jesus have chosen the imagery of "Father" to portray God?

Dads don't have it as easy as they used to, perhaps. But how important Christian fathers are! A study of church attendance sometime back showed that if both Mom and Dad attended church regularly 72 percent of their children remain faithful to the church. If only Mom attended regularly, only 15 percent remained faithful. So the church is thankful for Christian fathers. And so are Christian mothers, needless to say. The number of young women having to raise children in a single parent household nowadays is startling. Of course, it is not always the mother who is raising the children. Again, we can be thankful for Christian fathers who take on their share of responsibility for nurturing their young. So if you are here maybe your father had something to do with it.

In 1969, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, a group of people was preparing to have a "hurricane party" in the face of a storm named Camille. Police chief Jerry Peralta pulled up sometime after dark at the posh Richelieu Apartments. Facing the beach less than 250 feet from the surf, the apartments were directly in the line of danger.

A man with a drink in his hand came out to the second-floor balcony and waved at the police chief. Peralta yelled up, "You all need to clear out of here as quickly as you can. The storm's getting worse." But as other party participants joined the man on the balcony, they just laughed at Peralta's order to leave. "This is my land," one of them yelled back. "If you want me off, you'll have to arrest me."

Peralta didn't arrest anyone, but he wasn't able to persuade them to leave either. He wrote down the names of the next of kin of the twenty or so people who gathered there to party through the storm. They laughed as he took their names. They had been warned, but they had no intention of leaving.

It was 10:15 p.m. when the front wall of the storm came ashore. Scientists clocked Camille's wind speed at more than 205 miles-per-hour, the strongest on record and much, much stronger than

Hurricane Katrina that did so much destruction to the Gulf Coast last summer. Raindrops hit with the force of bullets, and waves off the Gulf Coast crested between twenty-two and twenty-eight feet high.

News reports later showed that the worst damage came at the little settlement of motels, go-go bars, and gambling houses known as Pass Christian, where some twenty people were killed at a hurricane party in the Richelieu Apartments. Nothing was left of that three-story structure but the foundation. Of the two dozen people in the building, only one survived. (1)

Storms come. Sometimes they come suddenly and violently. Sometimes they tear your world apart.

Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over their boat, nearly swamping it. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. And he said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were now more terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Storms come. They may not come in the form of a sudden, furious squall, or a hurricane. Sometimes they come in the form of a phone call--from a doctor confirming a diagnosis, from a police officer telling you of an automobile accident. Storms come in many forms--a note from a spouse saying she's leaving, a pink slip from an employer. Storms come. Just as they came to those disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

Here's what's frustrating: Sometimes when storms come, it seems as if God is asleep. "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" asked his terrified disciples. And sometimes when we are going through a crisis, it does seem that either God doesn't hear or doesn't care.

You may remember Robert Browning's famous poem:

The lark's on the wing, The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven, All's right with the world.

Browning wrote those words in the mid-Nineteenth century, an era of boundless optimism. But after two world wars, the Holocaust, and numerous genocides, as well as the terrible specter of international terrorism, few people would now dare to say, "All's right with the world." Worse, as author Philip Yancey notes, "God seems to stay in his heaven despite all that's wrong with the world. Why doesn't He do something?" (2)

A Romanian man filed a lawsuit last fall against God for allegedly fouling up his life. The suit states that the man was promised a good life in return for "various goods and prayers," and that the

20-year sentence he's currently serving in a Romanian jail represents a clear breach of contract.
(3)

That's absurd, of course, but have you ever felt like suing God? Be honest now. Sometimes terrifying storms come up in our lives and we turn to God and all we find is an awful silence. And we cry out with those disciples of old, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

In our text for today, Christ does stir from his slumber. He rebukes the wind and says to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" When the wind dies down and is completely calm, he turns to his disciples and asks, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" I believe this is the crux of the lesson. We know that storms come. We believe that Christ has the power to calm the storms. Why are we afraid to trust God's promises?

Christ knew that his disciples were human beings, given to fear. He knew that they were still growing in their faith. His retort to them sounds harsh, but it is the harshness of a coach who wants his players to get the routine down precisely so that when they are tested they will be able to respond as they were coached. Jesus wants to help us with our fear--for a greater tragedy than the storms that come in our lives is the inadequacy of the response that we make to those storms. Let me make some brief suggestions about how we can cope with life in the midst of life's storms.

First of all, prepare for them. That makes sense, doesn't it? If we know storms are going to come, don't you think we ought to prepare for them? A TV news camera crew was on assignment in southern Florida filming the widespread destruction from Hurricane Andrew. In one scene, amid the devastation and debris, stood one house on its foundation. The owner was cleaning up the yard when a reporter approached him. "Sir, why is your house the only one in the entire neighborhood that is standing?" asked the reporter. "How did you manage to escape the severe damage of the hurricane?"

"I built this house myself," the man replied. "I also built it according to the Florida state building code. When the code called for two-by-six roof trusses, I used two-by-six roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane. I did and it did. I suppose no one else around here followed the code." (4)

That man was prepared. But suppose that storm had been cancer or the loss of a child or some great tragedy, how could he have prepared? There are many ways.

HE COULD HAVE MADE SURE HIS RELATIONSHIPS WERE STRONG. His family relationships, his relationships with his friends. It helps when you are going through a storm to have others there with you. You may not be blessed with a family, but you can build your relationships here in the church so that you will have people who will serve as your support group. Ask someone who has gone through the storm of an illness or the loss of a loved one whether close relationships made a difference. They do.

He could have also prepared himself for the storm physically, mentally, spiritually. For example, does your general health make a difference in a storm? How well you've taken care of yourself can make a significant difference when you are struck by a catastrophic illness. We don't talk about this much at church, but maybe we ought to. A person undergoing surgery or chemotherapy or radiation will generally do better if his or her overall health is good. Being in good physical condition is also a good way to deal with the depression that inevitably comes with a terrible loss. Prepare for life's storms by keeping yourself fit. Don't wait until the storm comes.

Mentally and spiritually we prepare ourselves by building our lives on the Rock. There comes a time in our lives when we decide what we believe and how we will live. "I will live according to God's building code," we decide. "I will live a life of quality, trusting God's promises." There are other ways to live that might bring us more sensual gratification and less sacrifice, but we believe that our lives have purpose and meaning, that a loving Creator has intended our lives for something more than mere animal satisfactions. And so we seek to live our lives according to God's code so that, when the storms of life come, we respond reflexively with faith and not fear, just as a well-trained athlete responds in the contest as he or she has been coached. This is not to say that we cease being human. We still may go through all the steps associated with grief and loss--denial, anger, rejection, guilt, bargaining, depression/confusion, and acceptance. But we go through the process without being overwhelmed.

And then, eventually, when the storm has run its course, as all storms do, we see how God has guided us through. We had despaired at times that we could possibly make it, but we do make it and we give God the glory. And, if we are wise, we reflect on the lessons we have learned from this experience. For this is the purpose of storms--to produce growth.

Robert A. Schuller tells about a farmer in Washington who was especially proud of the apples he produced every year, and with good reason. His farm was at a high elevation, and the cold winds that came through there made his apples especially crisp and flavorful. Every year, after he harvested his crop, he would polish those apples until they virtually shone. Then he would put them into beautiful packages to show them off. These weren't your ordinary run-of-the-mill apples but the kind that made beautiful gifts to send loved ones for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As word of his marvelous apples spread, it got to the point where he was inundated with orders even before he had harvested the fruit.

One year, just before harvest time, a severe hailstorm pummeled his property. When it was all over, there wasn't a single apple without blemishes on its skin. There was nothing wrong with the apples. They just didn't look as pretty as they usually did, and the farmer was afraid that the people who had ordered them might be disappointed and ask for their money back.

Then he had an idea. He took all of the apples with the little blemishes on the outside and wrapped every one of them the same way he did every year. He put them in the same kind of packages. Then he added a note. It read: "Notice these high-quality apples. This year represents the finest crop. You can see the blemishes caused by the hailstorm, which created the extreme cold giving the ultimate flavor and ultimate crispness to these apples."

Well, not a single order was returned. In fact, just the opposite happened. The following year when his orders started coming in he had many requests from people who wanted to make sure they got the apples with the blemishes this year, too! (5)

That's the way it works for people of faith. We don't escape the blemishes. We wear them proudly, for we could not be who we are today without the growth that those blemishes brought with them.

Storms come. Some of you are young. It seems like you will live forever. That's wonderful, but if you are smart, you will prepare yourself for that time when life sends us the unexpected squall. Prepare yourself by building strong relationships. Prepare yourself by keeping yourself fit physically, mentally and spiritually. Decide to build your life on the rock of faith.

Rabbi Jan Goldstein recalls one unexpected benefit from the 1994 earthquake that rocked Los Angeles. The disaster caused massive power outages all over the city. But, for the first time in years, Goldstein saw his neighbors wander outside at night and gaze at the stars. Usually, the artificial lights that powered the city blocked out most views of the night sky. In Goldstein's experience, few Angelenos had the opportunity before this earthquake and the subsequent power outage to appreciate the beauty of the stars. (6)

I wonder if something like that didn't happen that night to the disciples. After the Master had calmed the storm, there was a great calm. But the wind from the storm had cleared the air in a wonderful way and, as they gazed at the heavens, they could see the stars as they had never seen them before. And they reflected on this man who had power over the wind and the waves. And they learned the meaning of a life built on God.

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1. Christian Values Quarterly, Spring/Summer 1994, p. 10.
 2. Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).
 3. *The Week*, October 28, 2005, p. 8.
 4. *Leadership* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 49. Steve Farrar, *Standing Tall* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 2001).
 5. *Dump Your Hang-ups* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993).
 6. Jan Goldstein, *Life Can Be This Good* (Berkeley, CA.: Conari Press, 2002), p. 96.

King Duncan esermoms.com The wonderful writer Max Lucado tells about a time his wife Denalyn called as he was driving home. "Can you stop at the grocery store," she asked, "and pick up some bread?"

"Of course," he said.

"Do I need to tell you where to find it?" she asked.

"Are you kidding?" Max asked. "I was born with a bread-aisle tracking system."

Like a knowing wife, Denalyn said, "Just stay focused, Max."

"She was nervous," says Lucado. "Rightly so. I am the Exxon Valdez of grocery shopping. My mom once sent me to buy butter and milk; I bought buttermilk. I mistook a tube of hair cream for toothpaste . . . I am a charter member of the Clueless Husband Shopping Squad. I can relate to the fellow who came home from the grocery store with one carton of eggs, two sacks of flour, three boxes of cake mix, four sacks of sugar and five cans of cake frosting. His wife looked at the sacks of groceries and lamented, 'I never should have numbered the list.'"

Knowing that Denalyn was counting on him to carry out this simple task, Lucado parked the car at the market and entered the door. En route to the bread aisle, he spotted his favorite cereal, so he picked up a box, which made him wonder if they needed milk. He found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God's great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. As Lucado put it, "The heavenly banquet will consist of tables and tables of Oreo cookies and milk. We will spend eternity dipping and slurping our way through . . ." He doesn't finish the thought, but you get the idea.

He grabbed a pack of Oreos, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is, he thought, cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, he spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes he'd filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. He checked out and drove home.

His wife Denalyn looked at his purchases, then at him. Can you guess her question? It's an obvious one, isn't it? "Where's the bread?"

He went back to the grocery store. He forgot the one thing he went to get. The one essential product. He forgot the bread. (1)

Last week we dealt with the feeding of the 5,000. At the end of the story, the crowd is so excited about Jesus that they want to crown him King. This, of course, was not the purpose for which he was sent. So he withdrew to a nearby mountain. Today's lesson occurs just a little while later.

John tells us that, once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there at the site where he fed the multitudes, they got into boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Remember how we said last week that John always uses the word "sign" instead of miracle when he was describing the wondrous things that Jesus did. John sees these signs as evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. The feeding of the 5,000 with the fishes and the loaves is a sign pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus says to the crowd, "You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill . . ." In other words, Jesus is trying to point them toward a spiritual reality rather than a physical one. All they are interested in is having their bellies full.

This was obviously frustrating to Jesus. From verse 32 on Jesus tries to correct the crowd's perception of what just happened in the feeding of the 5,000. He wants to point them back to God. He begins with the manna given in the wilderness to the children of Israel, one of the watershed events of their life as a people.

For many Jews, Moses was the greatest of all the prophets. It was he who gave the Israelites manna. Jesus corrected their perception of that event in three ways: First, he reminded them it was God, not Moses, who provided the manna. Two, he wanted them to see that God is still giving manna now, not just in the past. And finally, he tried to make them understand that he, Jesus, is the true Bread from Heaven. Manna was food for the body, but Jesus is God's full provision for the soul. Jesus himself is the Bread of God.

The crowd didn't understand what he was talking about. Just like the woman at the well who didn't understand about the water that Jesus was offering her, the crowd didn't understand Jesus when he said that the food which he offered was better than the manna with which Moses fed the children of Israel.

Both water and bread in scripture are used in reference to that which gives life. Jesus called Himself both bread and water--for truly he is the giver of life (John 10:10b; John 3:16).

"I am the Bread of Life . . . He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Certainly, Jesus was not referring to the bread and water that only fills and satisfies for a while. For as he said to the woman at the well, if she drank of the well's water, she would surely thirst again, but the water he was offering her was Living water that would satisfy her thirst forever. And now, in our lesson for today, he was offering this crowd bread that would satisfy them forever.

You see, Jesus was making a profound point in the statement, "I am the bread of life," that, as Westerners, we may not fully grasp. For us, bread is optional. We may enjoy it, especially the variety of breads we can purchase in our super markets today. We can get our bread as white bread, whole wheat bread, multigrain bread, cornbread, flatbread, cinnamon bread, rye bread, buckwheat bread, Italian bread, yeasted bread, unleavened bread, sourdough bread, etc. We can get our bread as a biscuit, a roll, a waffle, a bagel, a bun . . . and the list goes on seemingly forever.

But in Palestine, bread was not looked upon as an add-on to a meal. Bread was the essential staple. You might have nothing else to eat, but as long as you had bread, you could survive. Bread was seen as that which provides life. Jesus was saying to the crowd and is saying to us today, "I am the one who provides life abundant and everlasting. I am not an option, if you really want life. I am essential. I am necessary."

You may remember that story that came out of World War II. The Germans forced many twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys into the Junior Gestapo. These boys were treated very harshly and given inhumane jobs to perform.

When the war ended, most of these young people had lost track of their families and wandered without food or shelter. As part of an aid program to post-war Germany, many of these youths were placed in tent cities. Here doctors and psychologists worked with the boys in an attempt to restore their mental and physical health.

These boys were suffering serious emotional problems. They found that many of the boys would awaken in the middle of the night, screaming in terror.

One doctor suggested that the boys' fears might relate to a lack of security. What could they do to make them feel more secure? Someone had an idea for handling that fear. After feeding the boys a large meal, they put the boys to bed with a piece of bread in their hands, which they were told to save until morning. For children who knew the pain of near-starvation, this bread represented security to them.

That night, all the boys fell asleep peacefully, each clutching his bread. The boys then slept soundly because, after so many years of hunger, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day. (2)

Because we are not as dependent on bread as Jesus' original listeners, we may not appreciate as much as they what he meant when he said that he is the bread of life. He is saying, in effect: "You cannot live without me. I am essential to your life." This may

be why the first petition in the Lord's Prayer is, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is a reminder to ourselves as well that all we need is from God and the daily part is our promise to pray everyday.

For many people historically, life without bread was impossible. People in less affluent lands have a much greater appreciation of this idea than we do.

This brings us to the essential truth we need to take away with us this day: Christ alone can satisfy our deepest need. "People will do anything to be satisfied in life. In fact, people are searching for life and meaning in life. The drunkard is looking for life. The drug addict is looking for life. The adulterer is looking for life . . . The corporate climber is looking for life. Even the American redneck, whatever that is, is looking for life.

"In each person, God has created a void. That void is the desire for meaning and fulfillment in life. Even though all persons are looking for life, many are searching in all the wrong places. Jesus is the life people are looking for in life. I believe firmly that all persons are in the process of searching for Jesus.. everyone is searching for Jesus. Each person here today is in the process of coming to Jesus. They think they are searching for meaning in life, but they are really searching for Jesus."

In the Lord's Prayer, the first petition is what? "Give us this day our daily bread." Of course that is bread for the body, but do we not need to seek daily for bread for the soul? That bread is Christ. Who else loves us as much as he?

Physical Presence, Personal Presence, Real Presence

Transubstantiation

There is a popular fable of a man who was in love with a girl who was blind. He loved her so much that he was willing to do anything for her, including help her gain her sight. She knew of his love but never wanted to burden him with being in a relationship with someone who was blind. She kept insisting that he should choose someone else and move on with his life. But he was unrelenting! He loved her unconditionally and didn't find being with her a burden but rather, a pleasure.

One day, he received the best news ever! Technology had made it possible for doctors to do an eye transplant to help the blind gain sight. What an amazing opportunity, he thought. But she would need a donor. Unfortunately, there was no suitable donor. So he made the most selfless, loving decision one can ever make--he sacrificed his own eyes.

But after surgery, and after she had recovered, the girl opened her new eyes and was amazed at how fair she was to look upon. Outside, waiting to see her, was he who had loved her from the start. He walked in and called her by name.

“Who are you?” She inquired. He told her who he was and to his shock realized how hostile she was. “I am sorry, but I cannot be with any eyeless man. I need a handsome man by my side. Do you see how beautiful I am?”

Hurt and feeling dejected, he walked away. When her family came to visit her, she told them of the audacity of this out-of-order man. From her descriptions, they realized to whom she was referring. They informed her of the young man’s great sacrifice and chided her for her indifference toward him.

Stricken to the heart, she searched profusely for him but it was too late. He had already left. (5)

Somebody else made a selfless sacrifice 2,000 years ago in our behalf. Jesus sacrificed, not his eyes, but his life so that we could have life. His was a far greater sacrifice. Ours was a far greater gain!

The bread of life has come so that we can have life! Are we, like that young lady, going to respond with indifference, or will we with gratitude and appreciation surrender our lives to him?

1. <http://maxlucado.com/read/topical/the-write-stuff-2/>
2. Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).
5. Contributed. Source unknown.
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