

“God Almighty”

If you have ever felt at loose ends, if your nerves have ever jangled, if you sometimes feel a bit - how shall we say - dislocated in the upper storey - if your soul is, once in a while, out of joint, don't worry too much. You at last know you are not one of the cherubim or seraphim, but just a plain, ordinary human being in need of resources beyond your own - just possibly in need of Almighty God.

Looking at contemporary life, a great deal appears at wits' ends. The frightful tensions and frictions of our day send us scuttling to the analyst's couch. There is a phenomenal run on all brands of “how to stay sane” books and we try every sort of therapy - searching frantically for security. Persons who cannot tie themselves together - find cohesiveness - in any other way, try gulping or puffing this or that or run from one “relationship” to the next, or failing all else - self destruct with some handy pistol. The daily paper records the tragedies of people at wits' end - a boy who wants so desperately to “be somebody” that he kills eleven others (in Iowa - none the less), a dozen stories about families falling apart, then falling upon each other, news of our own nation going off on strange tangents and the family of nations at their usual idiot feud, killing one another, now playing with nuclear toys like infants chewing on dynamite sticks.

As my father used to say when startled - “God A-mighty!” Precisely! In a world at wits' end - may be that is exactly what we lack, and what we need. In the creed this morning, we solemnly swore that we firmly believed in a “God ... Almighty.”

But do we really? For some of us, God is so small and weak, he's something we rather apologize for believing in. There are those whose attitude is - “I believe in God but please don't tell anybody at the club. I'll be embarrassed.” No wonder our life has no inner unity. No wonder we lack strength and courage. Small wonder we are afraid. How sad, indeed, that we have tried to shrink God down to our own pathetic size - psychoanalyzing Him with Freud into a projection of our thwarted hopes or making him, with Miss Meade, into a tribal fetish or, with Marx, a tool of the ruling class - indeed, we do anything and everything to get rid of Him so that we can live life as we please - which has turned out none too satisfactory - neither safe nor sound - not even guilt free.

So may be - we moderns need to be confronted once again with the ancient covenant God of Abraham. No small, shrunken God was He. Genesis 17:1-3 “when Abram was 99 years old (never too late for this confrontation) the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty.’ (The Hebrew is El-Shaddai, ‘god of the mountains,’ ‘god of the storm.’) ‘Walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and thee and will multiply thee exceedingly.’ The Abram knelt before Almighty God.”

Well, may be it is time for us also to kneel before God Almighty – god of the mountains, god of the storm, the creator God.

There is, in fact, no posture more adequate than kneeling in the face of our expanding universe; what better words are there to grasp the asteroids or even a comet than the words “God Almighty.” When you stand before the great natural sublimities of atom and galaxy what do you say – “gosh?” or “mama mia” or even “magnificent?” The only fully appropriate phrase is “God Almighty” - kneeling in humility.

Or what expresses adequate appreciation and thankfulness before all life’s gifts – before a sonnet or a flower, before a sonata or a friend’s face, before a child’s birth or the quiet death of a saint? Before a cool drink of water, or the touch of human love and affection? Or to whom can you be truly thankful for the gift of your eyes? What gesture? Kneel before God Almighty! Indeed all life’s gifts without this great giver are bare.

Or in the face of life’s tragedies – what better reaction is there than “God Almighty?”

The writer of the 91st Psalm was no fool – he was quite aware of “destruction” – of “the terror by night” – of “the arrow that flies by day” – his head was not buried in the sand.

But, in the face of these horrors – life’s tragedies – he was not obsessed with them – depressed by them – or cynical because of them.

What filled his mind was not gloom over man’s perilous position in the universe – but the real security of God’s people – thou who “abide (not those who make shorts calls on - pop in and out upon a whim - but those who “abide,” who live) under the shadow of the Almighty.” He speaks both to the individual and the nation: “Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the most high your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.”

We misunderstand this old Psalmist and make him foolish if we think he means simple physical security and immunity from adversity. Being human, he undoubtedly wanted and hoped for that, but knew better. He knew this faith of his would not be contradicted by his own suffering and death. Such trust in the Almighty was not contradicted by the crucifixion of Jesus, by Paul in prison or Livingston dying in Africa or by our own suffering and death. For “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” All we ask for is the almighty presence of God at all times and in all places. We take our strength from El-Shaddai – “the same yesterday, today and forever.”

The safe and easy road is not the proof we need that God is Almighty – but the courage he gives us for the steep ascent. We agree with John Bunyon's pilgrim:

“this hill, though high, my God, I covet to ascend
the difficulty will not me offend.”

William James once wrote: “It is the experience of myriads of trustful souls, that this sense of Almighty God's un failing presence with them in their going out and in their coming in, and by night and day, is a source of absolute repose and confident calmness. It drives away all fear of what may befall them. This nearness of Almighty God is a constant security against terror and anxiety. It is not that they are at all assured of physical safety, or deem themselves protected by a love which is denied to others, but that they are in a state of mind equally ready to be safe or to meet injury. If injury befalls them, they will be content to bear it because the Almighty God is their keeper, now and always.”

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand saying into thee:
“Fear not – for I am with thee – I will help thee – I will strengthen thee – I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

There are times I admit when we feel that human militates against the Almightyness of God. ‘Who made the world?’ [A child in Sunday School was asked and] being so accustomed to being accused of everything, he replied, “Not me! I didn't do it!” Sometimes, we are glad we didn't do it, for the world is in “such a state.” But if much of it is a wreck, the Bible says it is because of a fall. Man's fall – man's sin - his insecure pride in rebellion against God, has wrecked a great many things.

It will, therefore, take an Almighty God to put it back together again. We cannot patch ourselves up; we cannot save our own society. It takes a God Almighty. As in the covenant with Abraham, this all-powerful God, moves toward man with the power to change man's name, his very being; so in Christ, this sovereign God moves toward us with the force to reconstruct us according to his will. This creation of God is in the making. It is not yet complete – but the Christian sees its ultimate culmination in the reign of Christ – who is himself the very might of God Almighty – “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Since we cannot even tame the beast within us – whither can we ever tame the Russian bear or make him lie down with the British lion and the American eagle. But we Christians, believing that “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” know that in the full end, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and ...a little child shall lead them.” (Is)

So let us take the warning of G. K. Chesterton and not fall into the presumption that nothing is being done if we are not doing it, or into the despair

that if we fail everything fails. For the Christian, there is another dimension. God Almighty is in the field. Ed-Shaddai will not fail. This morning we sang, "Come Almighty to deliver." He will do just that.

And in the meantime our strong faith in the mighty Christ and our sharing of this faith in the covenant community of the church – gives us all we need of courage to face life with certainty. We are no longer at such loose ends. Because we are tied to Almighty God, we are tied together in a more effective whole – "like a mighty army." God builds in us sturdier character – builds many happier and more enduring homes – a most just and harmonious industry and society.

You call this a pipe dream? Where there is Almighty God, it is a dream come true. I've seen individuals and marriages and communities where it has come true – when Christ the Lord has triumphed over man's original sin, over his individual selfishness, his prejudices and all the other sins that do come trooping after.

This morning we prayed that matchless prayer of confession – among the classics of devotion which every one on us ought to know by heart – it begins – "Almighty and most merciful father"...and ends "grant ...that hence after we may live a godly, righteous and sober life" – and Christ is mighty enough to accomplish just that – even among us pious rogues and Presbyterian rascallions and - in summary – what better words can be uttered, therefore, before

- 1 – the vastness of the universe
- 2 – the gifts of life
- 3 – the tragedy
- 4 - and the sin of men than the words "God Almighty" – seen in the face of Christ.

"Almighty God, Maker and Preserver of all things visible and invisible; we adore thee in thine infinite majesty, and bless thee for thy wondrous love revealed in Jesus Christ, thy son, our Savior; to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen."