

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

Limited Percep... No, Limitless Perceptions

2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

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Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

I'd like to do something different this morning. Instead of launching right into this morning's sermon, let's do a prayerful spiritual meditation together. So, I invite you, everyone, to first of all, sit comfortably. Put both feet on the floor. Put your hands in your lap. Breathe in deeply through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Relax. Feel your shoulders relax as you breathe out. Be very comfortable. Breathe in deeply. Now, close your eyes. Keep breathing deeply. Your mind is too busy, too restless. Breathe in deeply and calm your mind. Quiet your thoughts. Yes... that's better. Now, with your mind calm, and your spirit and body relaxing, become aware that God is right here. Concentrate on God. Feel free to speak to God... in your mind, in your innermost self, acknowledge to God that you know God is present; God has filled this room with God's holiness.

In your mind, in your innermost self, share with God that you delight in the calmness of God's holy presence. Offer to God your thoughts and prayers about your joy of having God so close to you as God is right now. Talk to God in your thoughts.

With reverence for God, in your prayer, offer to the Holy One what storms you faced recently. Recall when you got angry, when you said hurtful words, when you were hurt by another person, when you felt guilty, when you might have made another person feel guilty. Share with God when you felt lost, alone, overwhelmed, exhausted. Offer to God where you are worried and anxious... maybe it's about your finances, your job, your relationships. Maybe it's where you question your attitudes your afflictions, your love.

God, the holy, mysterious, living presence in your life knows all about your storms. Lift your thoughts and prayers up to God from your innermost self. Admit to God that from your viewpoint, the storm can look threatening. Breathe deeply. If you wish, repeat after me these prayers: "The storms in my life swirl around me, O God. [repeat] Sometimes I get anxious and terrified. [repeat] Sometimes I can't see the way to go. [repeat] But, I know you see me, O God. [repeat] I know your viewpoint is wider than mine. [repeat] I know you love me [repeat] and want the best for me [repeat]. Help me not to trust [repeat] my limited perceptions [repeat], but to trust deeply [repeat] in your limitless perception [repeat]. Please help me to turn to you [repeat] so I can rely upon you, [repeat] and feel your peace [repeat] in the midst of the storms

[repeat]. Thank you, holy God [repeat] Thank you. [repeat] Amen. [repeat] When you're ready, you may open your eyes.

Meditational prayer, friends, is one of the greatest resources available to each of us as we face life's storms. And, just because our meditational prayer is over now, it does not mean that God has left this room. So, I encourage you to keep in touch with that holy presence as I speak to you about our limited perceptions and God's limitless perception.

It seems to me that Bible story of Jesus asleep in the boat during the middle of the storm on the Sea of Galilee clearly depicts these two perceptions. The disciples' terror increased exponentially as they saw the wind and the waves increasing. Take a look at Rembrandt's painting which is on display at the Gardiner Museum in Boston. This shows the panic etched on the faces of the disciples, their small vessel is being raised up on a high wave, about to be crashed down. All they understood was that this was a horrible, life-threatening situation. That was their limited perception. Their perception became their reality. They couldn't see that, even though it was stormy, they had something powerful with them. Oh, they saw Jesus with them, but they didn't know how to do what he was doing—relying peacefully on God in the middle of the storm sleeping. Instead, they are pleading with Jesus to wake up and be terrified with them: "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?"

But, Jesus knows of God's limitless perception. He knows that God has power in their lives to calm any storm. He knows that God sees the disciples. He knows God cares for them. Through Jesus, God is teaching the disciples to rely upon God's perception of things and God's ability. "Peace! Be still." There was a dead calm to calm the storms.

This is a powerful lesson for us. We are in the boat with the disciples. If you look closely, at an enlargement of the painting, you will see that there are thirteen disciples and one Jesus in the boat. Wait a minute. Jesus had twelve disciples... who is this thirteenth person? It is Rembrandt himself. He has painted himself into the picture (Sermon Resources for June 21, www.esermons.com, retrieved June 16, 2009).

Symbolically, Rembrandt is us. Sometimes we get so caught up in the ruckus of our lives, the storms threaten to crash us down, we choose to rely only upon our limited perception of things. We end up making our perception our reality.

But God has a different perception which means all possibilities exist with God. We are invited to rely upon God's limitless perception of our situations and have trust in God's ability to have command over our storms. God wants us to have faith that we are loved so much that our Creator will move heaven and earth just to give to us what we need (not necessarily what we want). We are encouraged to rely upon God's wisdom, timing, and love, believing that God will work peace and calm into the storms into our lives at the right timing.

I encountered a funny story that helps to capture all this. In Texas, a number of years ago, an oil well of a wealthy man caught on fire. He put out a call to all the fire companies in the neighboring counties to come and put out the fire, and to the one fire company that actually does put out the fire, he would offer a \$50,000 reward. These fire companies sent their best trucks and fire-fighting equipment they had available, but not one of the trucks could get within 100

yards of the blaze because the heat was too intense and the fire was too big.

Sometimes our limited perception of the fires in our lives is that the heat is too intense and the fire is too big and overwhelming. And we down we go in our faith.

Well, while the fire companies were pondering what to do, one fire company appeared late on the scene. They had a rickety old fire truck equipped with only a single ladder, a few buckets of water, some sand, and some blankets. This fire truck didn't even have a hose it was so old. Amazingly, when that old truck reached the point where all the other had stopped, the driver didn't even hesitate. He just kept barreling ahead until he and his crew were right at the blaze itself! They jumped out of that truck, threw the few buckets of water and the sand on the flames and began to beat out that fire with the blankets.

Sometimes God can use even the most meager of supplies, the most inept equipment, or the most bumbling of servants to get the job done—all because God has limitless perception of what's available. God sees what potential there is in all of us to douse the flames and beat out the fires and calm the storms.

The oil man was so impressed by that unbelievable display of courage that he wrote out a check for \$50,000 on the spot and gave it to the driver. "What are you and your men going to do with all that money?" he asked the driver. "Well, the first thing is to get those stupid brakes fixed on the truck!" (adapted from Sermon Resources for June 21, www.esermons.com, retrieved June 16, 2009). Sometimes storms come due to no help from us! We still rely upon God.

For everything that we do, life will give us storms. For everything we experience, whether at home, or at work, or in our families, or at church, our perceptions will be limited. We never have the full understanding of things. But, let us remember that there is always another perception, and it is limitless. That is God's take on things. May we rely on God's perception and wisdom. In all that we do, rely upon God in our prayers and then when the praying is over. May we believe in God's good will for each of us, especially as we minister in Christ's name, especially as we recognize, celebrate and affirm our ministry and our ministers here at Chapel Hill UCC. Amen.

Our Mission Statement: We are a community of faith united with Jesus Christ, called together to carry each other's burdens, share each other's joys, and to testify to the presence of God in our world while worshipping God and striving for truth, justice, and peace.

Thank you, O God, for these, our ministers who serve you in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.