

Standing Strong

Bible Reading:
Psalm 20

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How dare you?

It's a question that comes to us at various points in life.

Sometimes it comes when we engage in questionable activities, and people wonder, perplexed, why we would do such outlandish things.

Sometimes they ask with indignation - what we have done seems foolish, or even morally offensive and wrong. "*How dare you!*"

And sometimes the question gets asked because someone can scarcely believe that anyone would attempt such a seemingly impossible task. "*How dare you – where do you find the courage and resources to attempt this?*"

How dare you have children in today's world, with pollution levels going up and up; with drugs and sexual diseases devastating our western society; with weapons of mass destruction in nations all around the world?

Or, having such children, *how dare you* set them free as they become teenagers and then young adults in our world of temptation and testing and conflict? How dare you release them to fend for themselves?

With our economy on shaky legs at best, hints of a re-recession beginning to surface, and energy prices going through the roof, *how dare you* give of your hard-earned cash to the work done by Christians in God's name?

With divorce rates going up, and people who seemed so happily married, sometimes for so long, suddenly splitting apart in sometimes violent ways, how do some of you even dare to make plans to get married? *How do you dare?*

We ask these questions today as we are gathered together in worship. They are valid questions and ones that we, as believers, must be willing to face and answer.

And to do that we turn to a passage of the bible which was used by other believers, people gathered at the temple - the place of worship in ancient Israel - people also facing uncertain situations in their lives, situations that perhaps made them also hesitate and ask whether or not they dared to go on.

In the particular case of this one bible passage it seems to refer to a time of war. Enemies had gathered together to threaten the well-being of God's people and to disrupt their lives. So that challenge had to be faced. The passage we read gives us some clue as to how the people of that day responded, and how we can formulate our responses today, as well.

That passage is Psalm 20.

It is a prayer. Apparently the way it was used was that while the king, or whoever was about to go into this uncertain adventure, stood where all could see them, the congregation in the temple would recite vv.1-5, the priest or levite would recite what we have before us as vv.6-8, and everybody would join in again for v.9.

Let us follow this ancient pattern and read together the Word of God.

Notice when we get to the end that it mentions "*the king.*"

That's how we'll read it - but let's keep in mind that it covers all those who are anointed with the Holy Spirit of the Lord, called to live and do the work of the Lord today.

It covers us as we face challenges which stare at us and dare us to stretch our faith to the limit for the sake of Jesus.

This, then, is Psalm 20 - the Word of the Lord.

People: The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect you!
May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.
May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices.
May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill all your plans.
May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

Pastor: Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed;
He will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.
Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.
They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.

People: Give victory to the king, O LORD;
answer us when we call.

How dare you?!

It is sometimes thought, or at least the unfair caricature often is, that when pious people of faith in God run into something difficult or look to a possibly uncertain future, they duck behind a bush, drop to their knees and pray, while ignoring or tossing everything else in life aside.

They are labeled as ostriches... or worse.

Let's crumple that myth up right now and toss it into the garbage.

It's simply not true - at least that simply is not the truth about the way the Bible calls believers to behave.....

.....How individuals do it, of course, is another matter.

Notice what you recited in v.4:

*"May he [that is GOD] give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed."*

Planning, and planning well - that is stage one of Christian activity. For the church season ahead - individuals and groups are busy planning. Committees. Council ---- emails, phone calls, meetings, conversations.

May God.... make all your....

*.....**plans**.....*

succeed.

Planning;

working in preparation
intentionally

carefully.

- we teach our children and dialogue with them before daring to release them into the world
- we prepare budgets and are careful with spending as we handle our finances, even in choosing those Christian agencies we dare to support
- we send our couples through pre-marital counseling, talk with them as parents, before we dare to give them God's blessing on their marriage in our church

Plan, and do it well.

That's the first step that allows Christians to dare to live boldly for Christ.

But then what?

Is there more?

Answer - yes, there is.

A lot more.

For that we drive to the heart of this psalm, found in v.7:

"Some take pride in chariots and some in horses...."

[You may want to put it in these words:

some take pride in their tanks, F-15's,

SCUD missiles and chemical weapons....

some take pride in fax machine and day-timers and computers]

BUT

"our pride is in the name of the LORD our God."

"the name of the LORD our God"....

John 14:14 You may ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it.

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass, [that] whosoever shall call on **the name** of the Lord shall be saved.

Acts 3:6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. **In the name of** Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Acts 9:29 And he spoke boldly **in the name** of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil **in the name** of the Lord:

There is real power in that name.

The NAME of God is not some magical charm,

not some *Abra cadabra* that you can mumble to have the cave of delights and pleasure open to you.

It is the Biblical symbol of the reality and living presence of Almighty God.

The name of the LORD is another way for talking about

"the power of the LORD,"

the power of the very real Master And Creator of the Universe;

the One who works and cares for his people,

for those who turn their lives over to his control.

So in the name of the LORD we read Ps 20:

May the LORD....

answer you (v.1)

protect you (v.1)
 send you help (v.2)
 give you support (v.2)
 grant you your heart's desire (v.4)
 fulfill all your plans (v.4)
 fulfill all your petitions (v.5)

These are the biblical words of request we spoke.
 We **dare** to speak them because we rely on that power of God.
 We depend on it.
 We speak confidently of it.

You know well enough translating from Psalm 20's original Hebrew to English doesn't always get the full sense of a word's meaning. So it is with the rendition of v.7:

*Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
 But our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.*

"PRIDE."

The old Hebrew has a meaning somewhere between our English words for "trust" and "boast".
 It means: publically remembering and telling, clearly and confidently and gladly, what God has done for his people in the past.

It means: talking about how prayers have really been answered: recording them, mentioning them, publically announcing them - each believer telling the other, in the lobby or perhaps during prayer & share time in worship or in our homes over an informal cup of coffee.

"Hey, God is really alive. He does pay attention. Do you want to hear the latest of what he has done?"

There's a good guideline for discussion. We all know how easy it is to get to talking about others - gossip. Well, if we've got to do it, let's gossip about God; about what he has done and will do!

Notice how confident v.6-8 are.

There is a certainty there about God's promise to act for his people.
 That certainty is based on an incredible track record of actions in the past.

Friends, this is the **same certainty** with which **we** go on to face the future.
 And by forcibly reminding ourselves of that God has done in our lives in the past, we can dare to take risks for the Lord again!

And so we plan.

And even while planning, we take central time to retreat to **HIS** planning room,
 to drop to our knees in prayer
 to spend time in worship of His greatness
 to quietly meditate and contemplate in His holy presence.

It's critical to do.

And it's critical that we

NOT

do this

ALONE.

Remember what I said at the beginning about the structure of this psalm and how it was originally used.
 It's a **communal** psalm.

It was to be recited together.
And the truth of it is to be lived together.

We see another example of something like it in 2 Chronicles 20, where a king went to battle, but only **after** joining with his people in approaching God in prayer and worship.

They pray and worship **together**.

It's not just the commander who prays.

It's not just the people who pray.

And it's not just that they pray, each of them in their own house.

Hear 2 Chronicles 20:13

Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.....

They assemble

Side by side.

Arm in arm.

Young and old alike.

We don't go into life alone.

We **CAN'T** go into life alone.

We need each other's prayers.

We need each other's support.

Not just saying that I'll do it at my convenience in my home; and you do it when and if you feel like it in your home.

We do it -

assembled

together.

All the parts of the Body of Christ

Tight together.

And so **daring** to face the challenges of life in a broken world.

Daring in the powerful name of the LORD.

Daring to plan with the confidence that His Spirit will guide.

Daring - together.

Which is what we remembered and enacted here last Sunday evening.

We came together and ate bread – many grains of wheat crushed and baked together into one loaf.

We came together and drank – many grapes pressed together into one cup.

We dared to assemble in the presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

He who dared to leave his grand and powerful place in heaven

to become a human being,

to become one with us,

to live and die for us.

He who dared to give himself up entirely - even to death! -

FOR

US!!

He has taken us to himself. He takes in and holds close all who believe,
no matter how unique or different they might be compared to each other. He works for them.

He protects them.

He gives victory to them.

And so we **dare** to take each other,
and to work with each other,
and to work on behalf of others.

He has risked so that we might risk.

Remember our opening question - "HOW DARE YOU?"

Given all this, perhaps now we have to turn that around -

"Child of the King
HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY
NOT DARE?"

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, AMEN.