

Year A, April 2, 2017  
5 Lent  
Christ Church, Mexia

"On Sunday, December 7th, 1941 Admiral Chester Nimitz was attending a concert in Washington D.C. He was paged and told there was a phone call for him. When he answered the phone, it was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He told Admiral Nimitz that he (Nimitz) would now be the Commander of the Pacific Fleet. As soon as he could make arrangements, Admiral Nimitz flew to Hawaii to assume command. He landed at Pearl Harbor on Christmas Eve, 1941. Here was such a spirit of despair, dejection and defeat there, you would have thought the Japanese had already won the war.

On Christmas Day, 1941, Adm Nimitz was given a boat tour of the destruction wrought on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese attack. Big sunken battleships and various damaged navy vessels cluttered the waters everywhere one looked. As the tour boat returned to dock, the young helmsman of the boat asked, "Well Admiral, what do you think after seeing all this destruction?" Admiral Nimitz's reply shocked everyone within the sound of his voice.

Admiral Nimitz said, "The Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attack force could ever make, or God was taking care of America. Which do you think it was?" Shocked and surprised, the young helmsman asked, "What do mean by saying the Japanese made the three biggest mistakes an attack force ever made, Sir?" Nimitz explained:

Mistake number one: the Japanese attacked on Sunday morning. Nine out of every ten crewmen of those ships were ashore on leave. If it had been another day or those same ships had been lured to sea and been sunk, we could have lost 38,000 men instead of 3,800.

Mistake number two: when the Japanese saw all those battleships lined in a row, they got so carried away sinking those battleships, they never once bombed our dry docks on the opposite side of the harbor from those ships. If they had destroyed our dry docks, we would have had to tow every one of those ships to America to be repaired.

As it is now, the ships are in shallow water and can be raised. One tug can pull them over to the dry docks, and we can have them repaired and at sea by the time we could have towed them to America. And I

already have crews ashore anxious to man those ships (recall mistake #1).

Mistake number three: Every drop of fuel in the Pacific theater of war is in top of the ground storage tanks five miles away over that hill. One attack plane could have strafed those tanks and destroyed our entire fuel supply, but it didn't.

That's why I say the Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attack force could make, or God was taking care of America." (pause) Which do you think it was?

In the time of the prophet Ezekiel, the Hebrew people had been conquered by Babylon with many of them taken to Babylon in exile, including Ezekiel and his wife. I imagine that those people, and even those left in Judea or scattered elsewhere, felt very much like the people near Pearl Harbor in December 1941 - maybe worse. Surely, Israel was dead, destroyed with no hope for the future - the condition symbolized by the dry bones. But God gives Ezekiel the vision that Israel can and will live again; they will be restored on their ancestral land.

Jesus is summoned by Mary and Martha because Lazarus is ill. But for some reason, Jesus doesn't hurry to Bethany, as one might expect. Instead, he stays another two days where he is. That's good with the disciples; just a few days ago the Jews were ready to stone Jesus in Jerusalem. They are not interested in going back and putting themselves in danger. Bethany is only a couple of miles from Jerusalem and many of the Jews will be drawn there for the funeral, so to speak.

But Jesus, after the wait, is now determined to go. When they arrive, they find that Lazarus has been dead for four days. Mary and Martha are distraught; if only Jesus had been there earlier, he could have done something. Now Lazarus is dead and nothing can be done. All of the mourners are crying - of course, some were probably paid to do so, but no one expects that anything can be done now, except to mourn. The situation is hopeless. But God answers Jesus' prayer and restores Lazarus to life.

So many times we are prone to focus on the bad in the situations we encounter, we are given over to helplessness or depression and lose our hope. We forget that God can do anything and everything. We overlook the possible good that can come from the situation. We

forget that whatever happens on this earth, we have a choice. We can lose hope/give up, or we can trust in God.

Recall the words God spoke through Ezekiel: "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live..." Or as Robert Hereth put it in "Listening to Lent," The God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus, the great God of our Christian faith, is the God who has given us life in the first place, and he has the power to give us life again." This is indeed good news! Maybe God was taking care of America. But even in the worst case, God is with us and when we depart from this life, we can live with God. So hopefully, through trust in God, we can remain positive regardless of what happens.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.