

God Is Still In Control

It's August, it's hot and summer is in high gear. I turned on the news this morning only to be overwhelmed by the tragedy I beheld. I came to see that things are heating up all over our globe. I was first bombarded with information on the conflict in the Middle East. I saw images of armed missiles fly from Gaza into Israel. I saw Israel's "Iron Dome," spring into action. Israeli missiles intercepted the Palestinian rockets in the atmosphere. I saw tunnels from Gaza into Israel destroyed. Hamas used these tunnels to cross into Israel and wreak havoc. There were images of Israeli missiles flying into Gaza. I saw residents of Gaza crying in anguish. They had no electricity, no running water and lived in constant fear or injury and death. I saw the aftermath of missile fire on refugee camps, hospitals and schools in Gaza. Hamas blamed Israel for these atrocities. Israel blamed errant Hamas missiles. Egypt and the US have tried and failed to broker cease fires. So far there are no signs pointing to a resolution of this crisis in the near future. All signs point to its escalation.

Following a commercial break, my screen was filled with images of the crisis in the Ukraine. A Malaysian Air flight was once again in the news. The jetliner was shot down over the Ukraine. Kiev and the West accuse pro-Russian rebels of shooting the plane down. Moscow says the Ukrainian government is responsible for the crash, which killed all 298 people on board. The Ukrainian Army and the pro-Russian rebels are locked in battle. This conflict seems to be heating up daily. The West is gathering evidence of Russia's culpability in the Ukrainian Crisis so that more severe sanctions can be placed on Russia. Many are worried that this conflict could become global if the use of violence and sanctions increase.

Attention then turned to the outbreak of the Ebola disease in Africa. Ebola is a severe disease that is caused by a virus. Up to 90% of those who contract this disease die. It causes pain, fever, diarrhea, and vomiting. The virus is native to Africa. It developed first in animals before spreading to humans. The virus is passed by contact with blood and other bodily fluids from an infected person. It is most commonly spread among families or to caregivers when precautionary measures, such as disposable gloves and face masks, are not observed. The virus has spread in Africa due to the mass failure to use precautionary measures. The disease could spread throughout the world by infected patients traveling on international flights. Health professionals worry about the potential of this deadly disease. If this disease spreads the death toll could be massive.

It is impossible to calculate the loss of life and destruction that an escalation of one, let alone all three, of these crises would bring. The sad truth is that these three crises are only the tip of an iceberg. There are hundreds of other crises simmering all over our world. Crime, the illegal drug trade, terrorism, natural disasters, poverty, economic downturns, recessions, civil wars, and conflicts between neighboring nations are found throughout our world. The escalation of any of these crises could wreak havoc on our globe. The world seems to be spiraling out of control.

I believe all these crises are evidence of a battle between good and evil which has raged and continues to rage in this world. This global battle even finds expression in our individual lives. The Apostle Paul wrote: "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me." (Romans 7:21-23) It seems as though no one is in control. Who can save this world? I believe that God is still in control. I believe that God and good will prevail. I believe that God calls all Christians to become involved in the struggle of good against evil. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit call Christians to unceasing prayer for the

world. God calls us to pray because prayer changes things. Prayer changes things because the power in prayer is the one to whom we pray. Jesus inspired the Apostle Paul to write: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Jesus Christ calls Christians to pray that God take control of and inspire world leaders and soften their hearts so that peace may be found, honest labor can be protected and may prosper and the wholesome fruits of life can flourish.

Jesus Christ calls his people not only to pray for peace, but also to reach out and help those who suffer as a consequence of the battle of good and evil. Jesus Christ calls his people to reach out with the peace of Christ, the Gospel, at home and abroad, one person at a time. At first, the Apostle Paul made war on the Church. He actively persecuted, arrested, imprisoned, punished Christians and even sanctioned their execution. Jesus came into his life and transformed Paul from an enemy into a friend and then into an Apostle who was the most prolific writer in the New Testament and greatest evangelist and church planter ever.

The Gospel that Paul preached declared that, we are unable to do good or overcome evil and death in our world and in our individual lives, by our own efforts. He taught that Jesus Christ overcame evil and death. Jesus overcame evil by living a perfect life and by dying a sacrificial death as our substitute, bearing our sins as he suffered and died on the cross. Jesus overcame death by his glorious resurrection. The Gospel promises forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. The Gospel promises that, just as a seed takes hold in good soil and grows and produces a crop, the Gospel message will take hold in a repentant mind and will cause faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to grow and cause good works to flow. Jesus admonished Christians to reach out and give tangible aid to others, for in rendering this aid, we may indeed find that we rendered aid to Jesus himself. (Read Matthew 25:31-46).

Through his proclamation, Paul equipped and inspired Christians of his generation, and every generation that followed, to reach out to the people around them through the preaching of the Gospel and acts of sacrificial giving. The Gospel message was always and will always be attacked by the evil in our world. In Paul's day and the two centuries that followed the Roman Empire responded to the proclamation of the Gospel with violent persecution. However, in the end the Gospel prevailed and Christianity was at first accepted and then became the only religion of the Empire. This battle between good and evil continues in our world, and within the Church, and will cause much destruction. We Christians must therefore pray that God will take control of us so that by our words and sacrificial giving we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel that has the power to transform people from enemies into friends in this life and, to grant to all who believe, eternal life with God when God brings the global conflict between good and evil to its appointed end.

Come experience the Gospel that transforms at a Church near you. At Grace we meet of worship at 9:00 and 10:30 AM every Sunday. In Christ, Pastor Ed Skutshek