Follow Jesus Sermon Series

"Follow the Cloud" -- Mark 15:33

Lent Midweek 6 Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

The raging predators of the evil one appeared to have their quarry in their clutches as the congregation of God pressed against the waters of the Red Sea. Pharaoh's forces bore down on the people of God. The reality was, that unless a Divine intervention of some sort occurred in quick order, there would be slavery and death awaiting one and another of Abraham's descendents. Two acts of God took place. No doubt you recall that the LORD divided the waters in order to provide a way of escape for the people from whom the Messiah would come. Not only did He provide deliverance for the Hebrew people, but just as importantly, God prevented Pharaoh's army from coming near them - the way of escape and the holding back of the enemy.

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Those two marvelous acts of God point to the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ, Whose sacrifice of Himself for the sins of all people, provided the Way of escape ... the Way from this land of bondage and into the Presence of the LORD in the Promised Land. In addition, that Divine, Old Testament Pillar of Cloud stood in the night and foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Who, many generations later, was posted in the darkness at the Place of the Skull. Jesus, Who had led His disciples, now moves behind them and places Himself between hell's hordes and eternal death.

Once again, on this night we behold and ponder this Divine Pillar - Jesus - and what He has done for us in securing our forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. We who are His disciples follow Him. The sermon text is Mark 15:33 and the theme is ...

... "Follow the Cloud"

"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

There are two clouds that concern us this evening, yet only one that is able to give any comfort.

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We'll follow this last Cloud after acknowledging the first one, the one that always follows us in the here and now; that is ...

... The Cloud of Death.

In this cloud we have the way of this world's existence apart from God's merciful and gracious Word of forgiveness applied to the individual soul. This is the Law that God has etched on the petrified heart and given on tablets of stone.

From out of the darkness of the cloud-covered mountain the LORD God Almighty declared that one part of His Word was finished. The prophet relayed this message to the people. His words are recorded in the 5th chapter of Deuteronomy, "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them upon two tables of stone, and gave them to me" (v. 22). Thus it is written and so it is true that "the Law was given through Moses" (John 1:17).

While "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), "the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). This is the Cloud of Death. Job describes the situation of the fading away of life due to sin and of being overtaken by the fair and by the unfair consequences of life in this world. He confesses, "Terrors are turned upon me; my honor is pursued as by the wind, and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud" (Job 30:15). So, it's not that man follows the cloud of death. Rather, the Cloud of Death follows and pursues and, for one, quickly takes, for another, slowly overtakes. Again, Job describes the truth ...

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"Has not man a hard service upon earth, and are not his days like the days of a hireling? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like a hireling who looks for his wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. ... As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him any more" (Job 7:1-5, 9-10).

Truly, "there was darkness over the whole land." And what does God say to the faithful Job who registers such a complaint? Well, such a man is called ... to repent. And what does God say to those who have, to one degree or another, departed from Him? Listen to the LORD via the Prophet Hosea and the Apostle John: "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away" (Hosea 3:4). "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4-5).

The Cloud of Death has overtaken and will overtake those who are careless with the eternal things of God. We have been given the Biblical example of the children of Israel.

"I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural

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food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did" (1 Corinthians 10:1-6). For "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

One might ask, "Faith? Faith in what?" The answer brings us to ...

... The Cloud of Life ...

and the encouragement and invitation to "Follow the Cloud."

In Genesis 9, God revealed His Promise following the Flood. He declared, "I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember My Covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting Covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (v. 13-16).

The disciples stood on the holy ground of the Mount of Transfiguration "when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a Voice from the cloud said, 'This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him'" (Matt. 17:5). Come to Calvary's holy mountain to hear Him. Listen, for ...

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"... when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Mark 15:33) and "then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!'" (Luke 23:46).

Dearly Beloved, in the Bible God is often present within and/or accompanied by a cloud and deep darkness. In such a manner does the LORD gives His sure and certain Word ... both Law and Gospel. As we have heard the Ten Commandments were given to man in the midst of the thick darkness of the mountain's dreadful cloud. The Law was revealed by God and it was complete and, as the Bible declares "He added no more" (Deut. 5:22).

The Gospel was proclaimed by God "when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" and Jesus cried out, as the Word declares, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The payment for the sins of all is made and is complete. With the Resurrection of the crucified Christ on the third day, the Good News spoken to grieving Mary on Easter morning when the Son had risen, may be likened to the Word of forgiveness that comforted repentant Israel; that is, to the true Church of both testaments:

"Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:21-22).

The Cloud of Life leads the Church and each disciple therein. The Exodus Congregation followed the Christ and "throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the

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tabernacle, the people of Israel would go onward; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not go onward till the day that it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the House of Israel" (Exodus 40:36-38).

Though the Tent of Meeting is gone, and despite the fact that the Temple stands no more, and although the Ark of the Covenant has disappeared, the LORD God remains present with His Church of all ages, uniting us today with the saints of old ... from Adam on to all the holy ones in this sanctuary, as well as with the angels and the archangels and all the company of heaven. This will continue as promised by the Word of God until Jesus, Who is certainly with us along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, returns "in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a Cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the Right Hand of the Throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

All of this, and more, because "when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Amen.

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