

April 6 –Give It To God

2 Kings 19:14-19

James Moore, in his book, talks about King Hezekiah. He is one of the Kings of Judah that we don't always read about. His father Ahaz, was one of the worst kings Judah ever had. He was mean and ruthless and did not worship the one true God. Hezekiah, on the other hand, was one of the most faithful kings to ever reign in Judah. He came to power in Jerusalem when he was twenty-five and he reigned for twenty-nine years. He was a great reformer. He destroyed the pagan idols and called the people back to the faith of Moses. He worshiped God and held fast to the commandments. Just because he was faithful didn't mean that he had an easy time as king. He reigned at the time when the Assyrians were at the peak of their power. They had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and taken its people into captivity. Now Assyria and their king, Sennacherib, was attacking cities in Judah and moving toward the capital city of Jerusalem.

King Hezekiah begged for leniency. He had given the Assyrians all the money from the temple and the king's treasury. But it was not enough. Sennacherib was not going to be happy until he had taken Jerusalem. He sent emissaries to the people of Jerusalem telling them to not listen to their king and surrender or they were doomed. He says even more, "Hezekiah will tell you to trust God but pay no attention. Your God is powerless against me. I have destroyed others and carried away their gods so I will do the same to you."

In many ways this should sound familiar. When we are going through really difficult times we fear, or we have people tell us, that God is powerless to save us. Oh they don't use those words but the meaning is the same. We hear, you have to be realistic, or you can't expect God to bother about every little situation or just give up and don't try. When we are going through these tough times and we are surrounded by doubt, what do we do?

Hezekiah gives us a good road map for handling these kinds of situations. He first of all reviewed his problems with God. He did it in a specific way. He took the letters from the ambassadors of the king of Assyria and went to the temple and spread them

out before the Lord. What he did was to stop and lay out all of the specifics of the problem. He didn't prejudge what answer he wanted. And then gave thanks for God's help even before God had done anything. Let us see how this can work for us.

It is always good to slow down and set out the specifics of our problem. When I am going through a difficult time and I am getting advice from many different directions I find it very helpful to pause and list the problems and the solutions that are available.

Laying things out this way gives us some clarity. It helps us to separate the facts from the fears. It helps us separate the facts from our desires. The other thing to be noted is that he took it to the temple. Or we would say, he took the problem to church. For me this says there is an expectation that God will help you with this problem. We are reminded that God has been at work in the past in our lives and this should cause us to approach God with trust. Hezekiah did the right thing in taking his problem to the temple. When you have an important problem it is good, in my opinion, to bring it into a holy space. I am not saying that prayers at home are not as effective as prayers at church, but bringing them to church helps me, at least, to focus and feel the presence of God.

In Bellingham, the hospital was founded by an order of Catholic nuns and so it had a very nice chapel. Several times, when I was helping families deal with life and death issues, I would take them to the chapel. It was not just a quiet place to talk away from all the busyness of the hospital but it was also a holy place. It helped me, as I led families in making those most difficult decisions, to think on God. I know that this is something people will at times do when they are facing crisis. In every church there are moments when someone comes in and asks to sit in the sanctuary. They are going through a difficult time and need to sit in a holy space.

Secondly, Hezekiah had to still the voice of fear. He knew how powerful the army of Assyria was. He knew that if nothing changed Jerusalem would fall. But he also believed that God was with him and God had the power to create change. So he shared his fears by saying the things that Sennacherib had been telling the people and then talked about the power of God. His God was the God of all creation.

Fears are real and it helps to speak them out loud. Once we voice them we can also begin to see how God might be at work or at least that our God's love is bigger than our problems. This helps us in those difficult times when we too have to stifle fear. We need to recall that God is with us and we are not going through this time alone. There is great power in this.

I recall when I had a health scare many years ago. The doctor kept reassuring me that the symptoms probably meant nothing but... and because there was some doubt I was running through all kinds of tests. The doctor had to tell me that there was one possibility, he kept emphasizing it was slight, that I had a form of cancer and if so it would be terminal and quickly. I was young with two young children. Talk about all the voices of fear running around in my mind. I laid out my problem to God. I did just what Hezekiah did. I laid out the worst case scenario and then began to celebrate how God had always been with me and how I had seen God present in the lives of others when they were going through difficult times. The more I focused on God with me, the less intense were the fears. I still had a sleepless night before the tests and the six days waiting for results were an agony, but remembering God was greater than the illness was a comforting fact. And, the test came back confirming the doctor's opinions and the issue was indeed minor and soon forgotten.

But this only works when you come with an open mind. Hezekiah wanted God to intervene and turn back the King. He gave praise to God for listening. This time Sennacherib hears that there is a plot against him so he turns towards home leaving Jerusalem alone. It will fall later but not now. Hezekiah found a way through that tough time.

This is probably the hardest thing this approach asks us to do. We often bring our problems to God but we also bring along the solution we want to hear to that problem. It is as if we are praying, "Lord, help me to know what to do as long as it is...." To be open to whatever happens and give thanks, that is hard, very hard.

We know that ultimately truth wins; ultimately, love wins; ultimately God wins. But we also know that sometimes we live on this side of ultimately. Hezekiah knew this.

Even if Jerusalem had fallen to brute force, what he did was solid and life giving. Laying our problems before God with an open mind, in trust and in praise, does not mean that things will always turn out the way we want them to. This story of Hezekiah is not some magic formula for getting our way. It is a way to examine the issues, renew our trust in God which will banish the fears and then whatever happens we know God is with us.

I have a friend who is going through some really challenging times health wise right now. I don't believe Tom knows the story of Hezekiah but he has been doing much of what we talked about. He learned he had a small growth below his right ear. He prayed that it wouldn't be cancerous. It was. He prayed it would remain small and contained. That wasn't the case. Almost everything he wished and prayed for has not happened. As he faces radiation and chemo he is still full of fear. But the amazing thing is all of his comments on social media are upbeat. He gives thanks for his family. He gives thanks for the doctors. He gives thanks for his church. He is so thankful his son can run the business while he is incapacitated. He continues to seek prayers as he lays his concerns before God. He ends every one of his posts, "God is Good." He understands that the love and support of family and friends and his faith is the most precious of gifts. Yes he laid his problems before God. He asked for what he wanted. But he has been open to how God is answering his prayers and this has conquered many of his fears and filled him with praise.

God is with us. Never forget that. We sometimes are so overwhelmed that we have to lay it all out to God. God does listen. God will help us move beyond the voices of fear that shriek so loudly to where we can really listen and decide and then in trust we can move forward knowing that whatever happens God is with us. Sometimes, as in Hezekiah's case a miracle really happens and those things we fear are turned away. Other times that which we fear happens but we face it with trust and praise because we have taken the time to be connected with God, to listen, really listen, and this gives us the tools to move forward. So lay your troubles before God when the "World Takes the Wind Out of Your Sails" for God is listening.