

Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B)

Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

June 19-20, 2021

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Has weather ever frightened you? Have you been in a storm you weren't sure you'd survive?

Some of you may have felt that way sheltering at home, during Sandy, as winds whipped and water rose. Maybe you've been on a golf course, swimming in the ocean or boating, when all of a sudden thunder boomed and lightening flashed literally "out of the blue" and you realized how vulnerable you were, out in the open. My scariest experiences with weather have been on Route 80, to and from school, Notre Dame in Indiana. 'Seemed every time we drove back and forth for Christmas vacation, there was a blizzard. It's terrifying to be in a car on the winding, mountainous roads of Pennsylvania or the flat, endless highways in Ohio and Indiana, and have no idea where the guard rail is or how close you are to the car ahead or behind, because of a total white-out, snow coming horizontally, so fast and furious that you can't see anything except the dim glow of your own headlights.

So in today's Gospel the disciples are the ones who are scared to death. I don't know why Jesus directed them to row across the Sea of Galilee during the night. I guess He wanted a leg up on ministry the next day, and didn't want to waste valuable daylight with travel. He's catching Zzzzz's in the stern of the boat while the disciples are up and at 'em, navigating their way across that fickle body of water, still known for freak and violent storms that blow up without warning. Let's remember that at least four of the disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, are commercial fishermen, not landlubbers, so they bring a lot of experience and expertise to boating. They're not going to be cowed by a little rough surf and some wind. This storm that came upon them must've been a doozy, to frighten even them. St. Mark says the waves are so high, driven by such fierce and relentless wind, that water is pouring into the boat, threatening to swamp and sink it.

Is there anyone in your family who has a reputation for being able to sleep through anything? (I'm famously known in family circles for having fallen asleep in a concert hall and actually snoozed through the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth.) Jesus must have been like that, because he slept through not

just the racket of the storm but also through the boat pitching up and down and the sea water drenching Him! His friends are incredulous, scared, and maybe a little irritated: *“Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”* (Mark 4:38, NRSV) *“Teacher, is it nothing to you that we are going down?”* (*The Message*)

We’ve been there, right? If we’re honest in prayer, haven’t we at some point asked our God, “Lord, don’t You care that....?” “Lord, is it nothing to You that....” You fill in the blank. “Don’t You care, is it nothing to You that....”

- My heart is breaking.
- My loved one’s health is broken.
- My marriage is crumbling.
- I am at my wits’ end.
- I have no job.
- I have no hope.
- I am pregnant and alone.
- We are **not** pregnant and have tried so hard....

“Lord, don’t You care, is it nothing to You that....”

- There is so much strife in the world.
- So many children are hungry.
- So many people are homeless.
- So much of the ocean is clogged with plastic.
- So much of the rain forest is deforested.
- 600,000 Americans have died of COVID....

What are our life realities, what are the world events, that **we** take as a sign that God is indifferent? What are **we** afraid is beyond God’s power to control?

Thankfully, although Jesus was one of us folks who can sleep through anything, Jesus was not someone who needed two cups of coffee before He could function! The disciples roused Him and immediately:

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”

(Mark 4:39a, NRSV)

Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, “Quiet! Settle down!”

(Mark 4:39a, *The Message*)

Those words *rebuke* and *Be still! Be Silent! Quiet!* are familiar to us from a story we heard a month or so ago about Jesus casting a demon out of the man in the synagogue. Jesus rebukes the storm as fiercely as

He addresses Satan; Jesus stills the wind, calms the waves, as surely as He takes the wind out of the devil's sails. Mother nature and evil spirits obey His commands better than us.

Once *"The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass"* (Mark 4:39b, *The Message*), Jesus asks His friends, *"Why are you afraid? Have you **still** no faith?"* (Mark 4:40, NRSV) After all, they've seen Him perform a passel of miracles by now. Haven't there been times in our lives when we've doubted that God cares enough to help, that God is powerful enough to save our bacon, then God comes through spectacularly and we feel sheepish? We can really imagine the Good Shepherd asking us, too, *"Why are you such **cowards**? Don't you have any faith **at all**?"* (Mark 4:40, *The Message*) Our memories of God's goodness can be so short-lived. Our trust in God's faithfulness can be so sporadic.

That's the invitation in this Gospel story about the calming of the storm at sea: **trust Jesus more. Trust Jesus with all.** Initially this miracle that has to do with taming nature and not with physical healing was probably intended to drive home the point that Jesus is Lord of **all** creation, not just humankind. But then the early church was expanding its mission from preaching the Gospel to just Jews to Gentiles as well, and some people weren't so sure or so happy about that change. "We've never done it that way before." They needed the encouragement: **trust Jesus more.** We can use the same encouragement. We need the same reminder: you're not alone in this. When the storms rage, and they will, both external and internal storms, you are not alone in the boat. Call upon the One who may **seem** asleep on the job, but who can actually be summoned at a moment's notice by a believing heart, by a believing community.

The presence of storms in the world and in our lives isn't a sign that God is absent or that God doesn't love us. Today's lesson from 2 Corinthians catalogues some of the trials St. Paul experienced as he served the Lord:

- afflictions,
- hardships,
- calamities,
- beatings,
- imprisonments,

- riots,
- labors,
- sleepless nights,
- hunger.

Despite all that, Paul didn't even quip as Teresa of Avila once did, "Lord, if You treat all Your friends this way, no wonder You have so few." Paul said God was with his fellow missionaries and him through it all. Paul said they had all commended their lives and souls into God's hands and that act of surrender and trust gave them peace, strength, faith, hope and love enough. He wrote, "*...we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.*" (2 Corinthians 6:1, NRSV) The grace of God.... Grace: the love of God that comes to us as gift and not reward. GRACE: God's Love At Christ's Expense. *He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?* (Romans 8:32) The One who appears to be asleep is very aware. The One who may appear not to care cared enough to die that we may live. We are not "nothing" to this God. We are "everything." When we are afraid, when troubles swamp us, when we're drenched by a deluge of doubts, when we're afraid we're not going to survive the storm, let's remember where to turn, to whom to turn: "Lord, help." "Lord, save." 'Doesn't have to be fancy. (The author Anne LaMotte has written that she only ever prays 2 prayers: "Help me, help me, help me," and "Thank You, thank You, thank You!")

On this Father's Day weekend, we remember and give thanks for the fathers and father figures who protected us and made us feel safe when we were small. We also give thanks to our Father in Heaven, who sent the Son to save us from sin, death and the devil., who protects us still, and whose Holy Spirit prays for us with sighs too deep for words. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham