

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost June 20, 2021

Job 38:1-11, Mark 4:35-41

Within the Hebrew imagination, the waters of the sea are the embodiment of chaos and danger. The storms that blow up, especially on the Sea of Galilee as in our reading, illustrate this.

I have never been in a storm on the sea, but I have seen what happens on YouTube and heard and read descriptions from those who experienced it first hand. There is literally nothing stable to grasp onto as the entire ship is engulfed in wind and waves. Everything is in flux, direction means almost nothing. It is the perfect illustration of any situation where it seems that all our possible moorings, the things that are certain, are gone and we are helpless against the elements that seek only to destroy us. Tossed about at their whim. Point out how helpless we are.

What an apt description of the last 18 months. A time when we have all felt caught in the chaos of the storm. All the things that seemed so solid to us, even the basics of going to work and school, shopping for groceries, was suddenly in flux.

Like the disciples, like sailors in any boat, we quickly went about the work to try and make our way safely through this tempest. We pulled in our sails, keeping only enough to try and maintain steering and control. We put on our safety

equipment and sought to fasten down anything that moved. Trying to keep ahead of the storm. It has been a wild ride, hasn't it?

These last 18 months of the pandemic and the ongoing upheavals in our society have been challenging and exhausting. But they have also exposed a fundamental flaw in our society. The storms of life come- sickness, death, violence, loss of a job, loss of income. But our relative wealth, the veneer of prosperity and control tend to insulate us from the full consequences of them. Enable us to delude ourselves into thinking we can ride them out on our own. Even more that we can control the storm. You hear that thinking expressed every time someone says, "How could this happen here?" or "This can't happen here because..."

But, the storms hit anyway. And, despite all those privileges, I wonder how much are we truly able to weather life's storms on our own? The American Psychological Association reports that the rate of death by suicide increased 30% from 2000-2016. In that time the rate increased 50% among girls and women and 21% among boys and men. In 2019 suicide was the second leading cause of death between the ages of 10 and 34. Also in 2019, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death at 47,500 people. To put this number in some context, there were nearly two and a half times as many suicides (47,511) in the United States as there were homicides (19,141).

The causes of suicide are many and vary depending on the individual, but traumatic stress, hopelessness, loss and fear of loss, anxiety, social isolation, all

can be factors. All of these storms of life remove any sense of solidity from our lives and leaves us adrift and feeling unconnected. When the really tough times hit, our wealth, the things we have, nothing can truly anchor us. And that lack can sometimes have deadly consequences.

Friends, As scripture bears witness, as I have experienced myself, it is only God who can bring order out of chaos- we see this in the first chapter of Genesis as the Spirit of God moves across the face of the deep and brings order from it- light and dark, bounds the seas and brings forth dry land. And it is only the Son of God, Jesus, who can rebuke the raging wind and churning sea and bring a dead calm in the middle of the storms of our lives.

As Christians, this is what we believe- that the resurrected Jesus- fully awakened- has the power of God to put a muzzle on the howling winds, to calm the stormy seas of our lives, that he is the constant we can always reach out and find. With Jesus in the boat with us- we need not fear- for nothing, not even death, can overwhelm us. It is when we have faith, trust that Jesus is with us no matter what, that we can find the calm center in which to ride out life's storms. To accept that they are going to happen, but know that we can get through them.

One of the first and hardest acts of this Christian faith is to admit our own lack of control. To admit that no matter how hard we work, or believe, or earn money, or have privilege, no matter how strong we are, how much education we have, how many guns we own, we ultimately control nothing. That illusion was ripped away last year when it did not matter how much privilege you had, where you

lived, Covid and its consequences could touch you. When we accept that, we see how utterly dependent we are on the God who brings order out of chaos and on our fellow human beings, caught in the boat with us upon the storm swept sea. These are the gifts of faith- that we are in a boat with other people experiencing these same storms and working with us to stay afloat on the stormy seas. And because we are together, we can accomplish more for each other. We can join our strength on the tiller to steer a better course. We can divide the essential tasks among ourselves so that our chances of survival and success increase. There are hands to take over when we are overwhelmed and just need a break.

And, most of all, we have Jesus in the boat with us. The one who does indeed care that we are perishing, and who wakens to rebuke the winds and roiling seas that we find ourselves in. Who brings calm to our lives- even in the midst of the storms.

This past week I learned of a family touched by the spectre of suicide, of a family where husband and father was gone just like that, of a tumor found in a young spouse, of the death of a parent. Wind and waves of despair, grief, sickness, fear beating into the boat of their lives. I have seen in my life and ministry the desperate thrashing about of people trying to save themselves- often by striking out at others- thinking they are the cause of the storm... not realizing they are actually in the boat with them.

Friends, if these past 18 months have taught us nothing, I pray they have dropped the scales from our eyes so we can clearly see how little control we have. I pray

that they drive us again into the arms of Jesus. To trust that in his boat, all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

For this is where we find Jesus- in the boat in the center of the storm- saving us his disciples. God in the flesh come to earth not to condemn but to love humanity back into life. On the cross- the focus of hatred and fear for those in power, who thought they were in control- asking for God to forgive them for they know not what they do.

I am imperfect in living it out, but I do know that without God in Christ with me and my family this past year- our lives would have been dashed on the rocks. For God in Jesus Christ has spoken and whispered "Peace, be still" and perhaps the storm raged around me, but there was calm within.

We are still battered by the storm, true. There is not promise from God that storms will not fall upon us. But the voice of Jesus- the one who calls us to follow, who whispers to the wind and the waves, that voice is a balm to our hearts, brings fear to an end, reminds us that we are never alone, that in him lies hope. And with that hope, comes life. A life filled with meaning and purpose. That you are gifted by God in unique ways, called to share those gifts with others so that they might have life fuller and more abundantly. A life focused on proclaiming in word and deed all that God in Christ has done for us. So that others might join us in this boat that is the Body of Christ in the world.

Friends, there is hope to be found in Jesus. In him you are never alone. With God all things are possible. In Christ there is life... fuller and more abundant... even in the face of life's storms. Let's do our Wednesday practice... let us breathe.

And as we do let us listen- to hear Christ's voice. Calming the waves of the storms in our lives to stillness. Jesus, calling our name. Jesus, looking us in the eyes and saying, "I love you. I care that you are perishing, have faith and believe in the Good News, and come join me in living life... full... and abundant."