



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

Sunday June 20, 2021

Proper 7B

Homily by
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Jesus rebukes the wind and sea
Mark 4: 35-41

*He stilled the storm to a whisper **
and quieted the waves of the sea.
*Then were they glad because of the calm, **
and he brought them to the harbor
they were bound for.

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

I grew up spending my summers in Rhode Island on the waters of Narragansett Bay where my grandparents still live. It is perhaps one of the most beautiful bodies of water I've ever seen. When the sun hits the water just right, it is a shade of blue like no other - the surface brightly twinkles on a calm day, and when the weather is good the swells of the ocean calmly lift you up and down, like the rhythm of slow cradle.

And yet, like most bodies of water storms can turn the bay to a dangerous mix of crashing waves, driving winds, and wild currents with little warning. It's rare to get caught in bad seas these days - especially on short trips - due to present day technology and weather reports, But it can happen. And when it does, One is quickly reminded of the fragility, and smallness of human life, amidst the waters above, And the waters below.

Even as life on the water today still demands caution,
In Jesus' day, and during the time of the early church.

In the regions around the Mediterranean The relevance of this story was probably pretty apparent. Life on and centered around the ocean, was even more dangerous, unpredictable, and extreme than it is today. And indeed this is even a theme found frequently in the Old Testament. There is a spiritual significance to the fathomless depths and power of the sea. What we find constantly in the Jewish Scriptures, is a testament to God's Divine ability to control and contain the water's power of chaos, as read in the psalm from this morning.

In fact this is also what happens at the very beginning of Creation, when God breathed his spirit over the waters, collecting and calming them into the waters above, and the waters below, and it is also the mechanism by which God delivers Israel, across the Red Sea. With this in mind, when we look at this text in the context of what we've heard from Mark's Gospel so far, it begins to unfold for us.

The parables we've heard in recent weeks, are all about receiving the Word of God, and the way God's Word prepares us for the coming Kingdom. We can understand a shift in Mark's Gospel, from parable to Narrative, as a constructive tool in helping its readers develop an understanding of identity, and a sense of belonging to the power God. Perhaps in other words they gain a sense of discipleship, as they continue to grow in faith.

We know that Mark's community is faced with the uncertainty of life as a marginalized community during a period of heightened Roman power, power that has

turned Jerusalem to chaos, after the destruction of the Second temple.

This story most likely struck a chord, as it takes the community's seedling faith, as characterized in the previous parables, and in the disciples following Jesus into the sea, and offers it up to the biggest, darkest, most chaotic and powerful challenge yet - the storm.

Interesting to note, is that it is Jesus' idea to cross the sea to begin with. Whether this is some kind of test or not, it is clear that the disciples' faith is indeed shaken, as they battle the torrents, gales, and waves around them as Jesus sleeps peacefully, "just as he was".

When I was in college, studying architecture, I struggled a great deal with anxiety. I would deal frequently with bouts of worry, hopelessness, and fear, which were debilitating at times. As I look back on my own process of dealing with this anxiety, I remember the frequent feeling of utter defeat.

Around this time in my life, I had also just begun the ordination process, and I remember talking to the Bishop overseeing me, expressing a sense of self-embarrassment, as if there was a voice in my head also saying: "Have you no faith?" One week while this was going on I went to church for choir practice. We sang Marageret Rizza's piece, "Calm me, Lord".

With the question, "Have you no faith?" constantly ringing in my head, and myself - trying to make sense of what faith is in the face of fear, the main verse became a sort of prayer. I still remember the words

today whenever I feel particularly anxious:

*Calm me, Lord,
As you calm the storm,
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me, Lord, in Your peace.*

As I reflect on this, I try to make sense about why it actually worked. I wonder, why does this image carry so much power in my own spiritual life, and why is it so important in the Gospel of Mark? What was it, what is it about this image, this rebuke, that actually hushed the storm of emotions in my own body, as well as those of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee?

I realize now that for me it worked, because it replaced a fundamental sense of uncertainty, with one of deep, deep knowing, in those words, I knew that I would be okay: not just presently and physically okay, though with deep breaths that was a nice feeling to come back to, but rather fundamentally, ontologically, okay. I am okay - saved we are okay - saved because we are held in the life of God.

As Jesus calms the storm around his disciples, it becomes clear, though that the purpose of God in our world, is not simply to provide a sense of personal calm, as if God is relegated to the function of spiritual therapist. This may be a beneficial side effect in our faith lives, and one for which I am thankful to be sure, But this is not who God is and what God does.

No, what is revealed in this moment in the Gospel, is a cosmic truth, that the purpose of God is one of

exorcism, that is, the casting out of all things that keep us separated from God. God's purpose is one of power over a Creation that is seemingly out of control, so that we, as members of that same Creation, might be reminded of God's reign of peace, and attain a glimpse of what life in the world to come, what life in the Kingdom of God, is really like.

Furthermore, what is revealed, (Mark's Gospel is consistent in this claim) is that the Kingdom of God is near, and the nearness of God himself is made evident in the presence of Christ, the Messiah, amongst God's people.

In a National Association of Episcopal Schools Chaplains retreat this week, led by the Bishop of Indianapolis, we were reminded ultimately that as followers of Jesus, we are disciples of the Resurrection, Disciples of transformation. That is, we are always participating in the cycle of death and rebirth; the renewal of life transformed constantly into life with God. As Paul writes, even in the perception of death "We are alive."

The revelation of God's Kingdom to us, our glimpse, our participation in the transformation of Creation, and our own joining that transformation is determined by our proximity to the Real Presence of God, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what the disciples begin to realize when they ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Only in proximity - and therefore by our witness - to

Jesus, are we shown the power of God to transform not just ourselves, or this creation, but the order of the entire Cosmos, from one which gives power to chaos, violence, injustice, and oppression, handing it over to tranquility, peace, justice, and freedom.

This is the true purpose of God: to cast out wickedness darkness, and fear, and by light, and love to draw all things to himself in the ultimate transformation of all things. To be clear, I'm not saying that being afraid; or doubtful; is inappropriate or an unreasonable response to many things, rather I would offer a reminder that in the face of fear we know that by the grace, power, and presence of God fear is not insurmountable, because wherever we are, whatever we are up against, that is not our end.

The wonderful thing is, this transformation starts right here, right now. Every time we gather around this altar, and especially in this current season, we have a choice to make: to continue in fear, to turn and stay away from God's presence among us, or to draw near by faith, to behold God in Christ, and be transformed by the Presence of God in the Sacraments, in this gathered Body, and in the life of this Church.

Every time we are called to gather here, we have a choice to make: do we choose to forget God, and leave God behind in the midst of our uncertainty or do we choose to remember, to deeply know and trust that we belong to the loving providence of God.

I suppose though, you might already know the choice you've made, because you are here this morning. So

perhaps our task then is first to look around, and notice who is not here, who are the afraid, the sick, the lonely, the needy, the hungry, the forgotten, far off from the Presence of God.

We must ask ourselves, how then, are we called to share this Presence? What rebuke are we called to offer, to the powers around us which keep others from sharing in the joy of God's presence as we seek to share in the transformation of Creation, now and in the time to come?

As we move forward, out of this time of darkness, fear, and uncertainty, toward a more familiar way of life, how can we manifest our trust in God, and testify to the nearness of God among us, so that sharing in God's presence together, all might experience the enfolding peace of God: who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.



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