



SAINT LUKE'S

"FAITH AND FEAR"

PROPER 7B

JOB 38:1-11

PSALM 107

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-13

MARK 4:35-41

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

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This dramatic story of Jesus calming the storm reveals that Jesus is more than a great teacher. Even the wind and waves obey him. This story shows Jesus' divine power. The story is also about our humanity.

There are so many storms in this life that we cannot master by our own strength and planning. Outward storms – things that happen to us and around us. Then there are the inward storms: those fears and weaknesses that we cannot overcome by our willpower. We know those inner storms all too well.

This storm at sea happens overnight. In the middle of the night troubles magnify. Anyone who has woken up at 3am and lain awake worrying knows that everything seems worse in the middle of the night. When Jesus calms the waves, he also calms the disciples' hearts. Peace is as much for the disciples as for the storm.

Some questions arise too. Why does Jesus need to be woken up to calm the storm? Is he so nonchalant that he doesn't care about the disciples' anxiety? Or is it a test of their faith? Does Jesus have to be awake to exercise divine power? Would the storm have passed without disaster even if Jesus has stayed asleep? Maybe the most important thing is that in Scripture, the ability to sleep peacefully is a sign of absolute trust in God.¹ Jesus is able to sleep during the storm. The disciples are not.

The early church saw the boat as a metaphor for their community, buffeted about and at the mercy of secular winds. The storm to them

¹ Proverbs 3:23-24; Psalms 3:5; 4:8; Job 11:18-19; Leviticus 26:6

represents the trials of the faithful: like St. Columba banished from Ireland and cast adrift on the open sea in a tiny coracle. The boat on a stormy sea can be a metaphor for any persecuted community: LGBT communities, the Rohingya in Myanmar; immigrants coming into our country today and the untold suffering of children unmoored from their families; the Jewish peoples at many times in history. The little boat on a stormy sea may feel at times like a metaphor for *our* life. Life sometimes throws “perfect storms” at us. I grew up with the saying that bad news comes in threes. There’s a reason we speak of “waves” of grief. We are just dealing with one thing and another shocker comes, and then another. We are left reeling, disoriented. There is an old Breton sailors’ prayer which John F. Kennedy had on his desk as President. It is a cry we can all relate to: *O Lord, your sea is so wide and my boat is so small.*

As the storm swirls, the disciples’ first thought – even before “wake up, Jesus!” - is remembering. They have already seen Jesus heal many people with “incurable” diseases. The disciples remember and they know that Jesus can help and steady them. That is the first thing in the storms of life. We remember Who to turn to. We don’t throw out our faith when we are afraid, we cling to it. It is the life raft. We remember Jesus, we call on Jesus, and it doesn’t have to be polite. In the Hebrew Scriptures from the beginning, God’s people are not shy about complaining loudly.

Centuries earlier, in the Book of Jonah,² the sailors are caught in a storm, and they throw Jonah overboard in hopes of appeasing Jonah’s

² Jonah 1:4-6

God. By this time in God's relationship with humanity the disciples know this is not what God wants. The disciples do not need to throw St. Peter overboard as a sacrifice to appease an angry God. The disciples understand that the storm is not God's punishment. Rather, God is with them in the storm, as God is with us in ours.

After calming the storm, Jesus connects fear with lack of faith: *Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?* Is this your experience - that faith automatically calms all fears? It is not my experience. It is not the human experience. Faith gives a bigger picture to our storms but does not resolve them all. *This too shall pass* is sometimes the best we can manage. And that is a faith-full response.

We know that Jesus is fully human and has his own moments of fear. Garden of Gethsemane moments.³ I don't think that Jesus believes faith removes all our fears. I hear Jesus saying to his disciples: Remember what you have seen and heard. Do you *still* think God is indifferent to your struggles after healing all those sick people? Jesus reminds us of God's power and God's *care*. If we believe in a watchmaker God,⁴ a Divine Mover Who winds up the universe then goes on sabbatical, we may not expect God to help us in times of trouble. This is not the God of Jesus Christ. Our God cares. God may not remove the storm but God guides us through it.

Beloved - God cares about us. God cares when we lose our health or

³ Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42

⁴ William Paley in *Natural Theology*, 1802

our job or our loved ones. God may not resurrect any of those things or people in our earthly life but God helps us navigate the waves. And in God's good time, God may surprise us with some kind of healing. God may bless us with unexpected resurrection and new joy – not only in the next life but in this one too.

AMEN

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