

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. June 22-23, 2024

Scripture

Job 38: 1 - 11

Psalm 107. 1 - 3, 23-32

2 Corinthians 6: 1 - 13

Mark 4 35 - 41

Why are you Afraid?

Have you ever felt like you were in a situation that you couldn't control - that was headed for disaster? That you are powerless, tossed around by forces way beyond your control?

That's how the disciples felt as the boat they were in was being tossed about by the waves and the wind in the Sea of Galilee. Their savior, Jesus, was sleeping on the boat, oblivious to the fact that everyone else on the boat was panicking.

As I reflected on this Gospel lesson, I remembered a time when my daughter Kathryn and I were on a Sunfish, a tiny little sailing boat - which resembled a surf board with a small sail. We were taking sailing lessons with the Girl Scouts at Codorus State Park. The water was placid as we floated to the center of the lake. The hot, late August sun was beating down on us - and no matter which way we moved the sail or

the rutter, we couldn't move the boat. There was no wind to be found. We didn't have an oar on the little boat which barely fit the two of us. Kathryn was starting to panic. It was all I could do to try and maneuver the boat so we could find a bit of wind to power us to shore. I prayed that God would help us. The same God that Jesus commanded to still the sea, I wanted to help us find enough wind so we could sail to shore. After what seemed like hours, we found ourselves slowly inching toward the shoreline. When we finally landed and exited the craft, Kathryn muttered under her breath, "Never Again."

Mark's story of Jesus commanding the waters to be still is also recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The story in Matthew never appears in our Lectionary for some reason. There are some slight differences in the language that Jesus uses to calm the sea.

MT 8: 24 - 27

A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the board was being swamped by the wave, but Jesus was asleep. And they went and woke him up saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a dead calm. The disciples were amazed, saying "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

## Luke 8: 23-27

One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and he said to them. “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, and while they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. The disciples went to him and woke him up shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!”

And Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, they eased and there was a calm. Jesus said to his disciples, “Where is your faith?” They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?”

Mark’s Gospel closes on a similar note with slightly different words. Jesus calms the sea by saying “Peace. Be still! Once the sea was calm, Jesus asks his disciples “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great awe, and sad to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Each version of this story conveys the same message - with God on your side, your faith will protect you. It’s important to note that Jesus wasn’t telling his disciples to not be afraid. Rather, he questioned their lack of faith in God who has dominion over the Earth and all who believe in Him.

The disciples were amazed at Jesus' power to still the waters and the wind - perhaps they needed to be reminded that at the beginning of time, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

Water is both life-giving and is needed to sustain life - and has the power to take life away. We have witnessed massive floods in southern Florida where cars and homes are swept away. The wind can become so fierce when it comes in the form of a tornado or a hurricane, entire communities can be crushed.

I don't think these extreme weather conditions were at play in the Jesus story we just heard from the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. Yet, the sense of powerlessness that the disciples expressed, is similar to what people who have lived through floods, tornados and hurricanes have experienced and that Kathryn and I experienced when we were at the mercy of the wind to guide our little craft to shore.

The lesson in Mark comes after Jesus' teachings about the nature of our faith - comparing it to the smallest seed of all, the mustard seed, that can grow into a mighty bush that can house and protect birds. So maybe why that's why we detect a bit of frustration in Jesus' voice when he says to his disciples:

MK. why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?

MT. Why are you afraid - you of little faith!

LK. Where is your faith?

The next time we are caught in what seems like a perilous situation, we need to answer Jesus' question: Why am I afraid? Invite God to be with you - acknowledge that He is with you always.

Psalm 107: 28 reminds us that power to control the elements of wind and water is a divine capacity.

“He stilled the storm to a whisper and quieted the waves of the sea.”

Trust me, when our little boat finally found its way to the shoreline of Codorus Lake, Kathryn and I thanked God for his mercy in bringing us to safety.

Our sailing lesson turned into a lesson on faith - much like it did for the disciples when they crossed the stormy Sea of Galilee with Jesus asleep on the boat.

When we acknowledge Christ as our Savior and our Redeemer, we are no longer alone on the boat of life. Jesus doesn't tell us to not be afraid. Rather he asks "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Someone who understood the importance of faith was Emily Brontë, who lived in the bleak moors of Yorkshire, England. Author of *Wuthering Heights* and other classics, she was also a poet and wrote a collection of poems under the title "No Coward Soul is Mine":

"No coward soul is mine, no trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere. I see Heaven's glories shine, and faith shines equal, arming me from fear." January 2, 1846.

Written almost two centuries ago, Brontë's words are as relevant today as they were then.

Let us not let our coward souls give way to the panic and confusion that we see on our TV screens and hear on our streets. Instead, let us remain focused on God, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the source of all light and life, and let our faith in God and belief in the dignity of all creatures under God, protect us from the storms and turbulent seas.

Let us give thanks to the Lord whose mercy endures forever.

Amen.

