

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

21st Sunday of Quarantine (22nd overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

I Kings 19:9-18

Psalm 85:8-13

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

08/09/2020

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

22[Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee], while he dismissed the crowds.23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter

answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Silence and Solitude**

Good morning! Growing up I had two formative, but different, religious groups that shaped who I was. The first was in the church, embodied in places like confirmation and Camp Luther. Faith was old within this experience, it wasn't just MY encounter with God, but the encounter of God with God's Church for thousands of years. The second place was in YoungLife. Where the faith was old faithful at church, it was brand new for people in YoungLife. They spread the message of the Gospel

to kids in high school who had previously never heard the story. They did a huge push to try and get kids to attend one of their camps and it was there that they broke up the Gospel message into different “talks” for kids to hear for the first time. And one of the more profound experiences was after the crucifixion talk. The talk took place in the evening, and after hearing about God’s sacrifice and death in Jesus Christ we were given 15 minutes to go outside and sit alone in silence to think about it.

For many of us, we had never really spent that much time in silence, and coupled with the Gospel message, it left a profound mark on many of us. So there I was, in the mountains of western Virginia, sitting beneath a giant oak tree, just... existing. It was 15 years ago, and I still remember the way the wind blew through the branches, how the grass felt in my fingers. I was completely and utterly at peace within the presence of God.... Have you ever felt that before?

We have two powerful stories in today’s readings. In I Kings we have a wonderful story about the prophet Elijah and his encounter with God. Elijah has made a run for it. Fleeing into the wilderness because he is being hunted. He makes it to Mt. Horeb after a significant struggle and is told to go out on the mountain ledge. First there is a great rush of wind, stronger than the tropical storm we just had, so loud that rocks were breaking apart!

But God was not there. Next, an earthquake, the rocks that just been dislodged by the wind began to shake apart across the landscape, but God was not there. And then fire! Flames so hot that I imagine Elijah shielded his face from the heat, but God was not there. Finally, silence followed. And there was God. Some translations say that it was the “sound of a still small voice.” The story teaches us that we often look for God to make God’s presence known in big and loud ways, but God’s always around.

The Gospel story is about silence, but in a different way. We actually get two moments of it in the text, but the first one is often overlooked. Our lesson today actually begins with Jesus going off for some alone time himself. He sends the disciples off to cross the water while he goes up the mountain to be alone. Even God needs some time apart from everything else that’s going on.

Meanwhile, down in the boat things are getting interesting. A storm has shown up and made passage impossible. The disciples are stuck, and sometime between 3 and 6 am Jesus comes strolling along the water, as one does. We all know the story, they see him and assume he’s a ghost. Then Peter, always the first one to jump before thinking about where he might land, tries to walk on water before the storm distracts him and he sinks. Jesus grabs him and delivers those famous words “You of little faith, why

did you doubt?” And then, the moment that is important for the message today, they get into the boat and the storm stops!

Imagine what the disciples were probably thinking. They’re exhausted from fighting the storm, trying to get the boat across, and just when things couldn’t possibly get worse, a GHOST shows up! It turns out to be Jesus, which is crazy, and then Peter walks on water too, which is even crazier, and then the storm stops the second Jesus gets into the boat. It would have been an emotional rollercoaster.

The story is full of all kinds of interesting details. For a first century Israelite Jesus is invoking the same kind of power that God used in the first creation story. Jesus shows that he has control over the water, just like God did in Genesis where God separates the chaos of the waters, making a dome of some of the water and spreading the rest of it out across the world. God speaks and the elements listen, bringing order into chaos. And just like with Elijah, after the chaos of different sounds we are left with order, with silence.

I think that for most of us, these past months, while filled with a lot of solitude, have not been very silent. We’ve been overwhelmed with life. But there is a difference between being alone and being silent. When we’re alone we feel isolated, cut off from our community. When we’re silent we’re

making the conscious decision to listen to details we often miss. So when I say we need more silence, I'm not saying we need to cut ourselves off from everyone around us. We're not running away from community, we're attuning ourselves to better listen to what our community needs. My dog Ned hasn't ever said a single word to me, and yet his presence fills me with comfort and joy. So, in the chaos and craziness of our lives, may God show you the joy of silence, the joy of comfort in the presence of the Almighty, whether it be under trees in the mountains, in the safety of a boat after a storm, or the love of a faithful pup. Amen.