

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Job 38:1-11
Pslam 107:1-3, 23-32
II Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41
06/23/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

35When evening had come, [Jesus said to the disciples,] “Let us go across to the other side.” 36And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” 39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

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

Amen.

Stormy Waters

Good morning! A few years ago some family on Megan's side came down to visit. Her mom, sister, and brother-in-law were with us as we did the usual tourist stuff in the area. We spent some time in Historic Jamestown and hit all the usual spots. I can't remember why, but we ended up taking the Jamestown Ferry across the river to get to where we had dinner plans. Everything was normal until about halfway across when a huge summer storm hit. I have honestly never seen anything like this. The rain got harder and harder. And it started out as a novel experience, but very quickly got scary. At the worst, you couldn't see past the cars sitting in front of you, and looking out over the water was like looking at a wall. You couldn't see where the rain ended and the river began. Then it got REALLY scary. The wind was so strong that the ferry was having noticeable problems trying to cross. The already slow pace of the ferry became a crawl, the poor engine fighting just to keep us moving. I kept a cool face, but I thought I was going down like the Edmund Fitzgerald. We all started off by laughing at the rain, then shared awe at the strength, but at its peak we were silent.

As you can probably guess, the storm let up, and we made it across. But it left me with a strong sense of awe at what nature can produce. While the ferry isn't massive, it's certainly not a small boat. Now can you imagine what it was like for the disciples crossing in a storm in a boat that was probably no longer than 20 feet?!

Our Gospel reading today is another classic. It's a story so impactful that it shows up in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Along with the feeding of the five thousand, it might be the most popular of all of Jesus' Gospel actions. But familiarity can sometimes mean we take the story for granted. So let's take a closer look and see what we might find.

The first thing to notice is that the story picks up directly after the actions of last week. After the parable of the mustard seed Jesus gets in the boat and sails to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, what is now Lake Kinneret. One of the interesting details is that the story moves from the very broad to the narrow. In the beginning Jesus is surrounded by people. Remember that a few weeks ago the text told us that Jesus is unable to eat because the crowd is so large. A portion of that crowd follows Jesus, getting into their own boats to make the journey across. But the text narrows its focus on just the boat that Jesus is in as the storm hits. Even then, attention moves from the frantic disciples who fear for their lives, finally settling on a sleeping Jesus.

The text doesn't give us any clues, but I've always wondered. Was Jesus REALLY asleep? I mean, if he was, I'm impressed. He's like anyone who has served in the military, able to take a nap just about anywhere. OR was he just waiting to see what would happen? Was he smiling as he snored comically loud to annoy those around him? We'll never know, but you can't help but imagine...

When Jesus is woken up he immediately jumps into action; *“39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.”* If the narrative has been zooming in and focusing on Jesus throughout the story, it jumps out and shows us the whole picture when Jesus calms the storm. Dark clouds give way to sun, waves come to a lazy rest, and the rain stops. I imagine it happens so quickly that a rainbow appears in the sky. Then Jesus delivers a scathing rebuke to the disciples. The New Revised Standard Version translates it as: *“40He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”* But C. Clifton Black has a better translation: *“Why are you such*

cowards [deiloi]? Do you still have no faith?”¹ It’s as if Jesus is saying “after EVERYTHING you have seen me do, what makes you think this would be enough to stop me?”

The story is making a very important, but easy to miss, connection. When you get home, open your bibles and take a look at the very beginning. In Genesis chapter 1 God creates the universe. One thing you might not notice is that the chaos that God forms and molds is similar in understanding to the chaos of a violent storm. When Jesus speaks in our Gospel lesson, the disciples would have been immediately reminded of God’s voice in creation.

But it goes deeper than that! The creation story in Genesis is a tricky piece of literature. If you read other creation myths from other religions of the time you’ll notice something interesting. Creation only happens after the gods go through a great struggle. Sometimes their death was required, their blood providing the “life-force” that sparks creation. It is only after a very long battle, fight, or effort that it happens. Enter the first creation story in Genesis. Our God is so powerful that it requires no effort whatsoever to create the world. The simple act of speaking is enough to calm the chaos, to separate the waters into a dome, the water above and below. THIS is a God to watch out for, because this God is POWERFUL.

Enter Jesus calming the storm. Once again the witnesses are reminded of the power of God’s voice, this time in human form, doing something that was beyond their wildest dreams and expectations.

I get it. Life can be a mess. We look around at the violence around us and we wonder how it could ever get better. We put our hope in things like

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-6>

politicians or new policies. But it never truly makes the cut. The text today is a reminder that what seems impossible to us is as simple as speaking to the God of the universe. So, if you're feeling beaten down and defeated, remember that our God is stronger than we could ever imagine. Maybe instead of fighting on our own, we could call on God for help. Amen.