

The 5th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 24, 2018

Proper 7: Mark 4:35-42: *Peace, Be still! Know that I am God!*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Gospel reading from Mark for this weekend is a well-know story of Jesus calming the seas. Jesus, asleep in a boat, is awakened by terrified disciples, fearful of the storm they are caught up in. Jesus awakens and calms the storm. He then chastises the disciple for their lack of faith. Jesus and the disciples are all in the boat together. Jesus may be asleep, physically, but his disciples' faith is asleep as well. Jesus speaks with authority and the storm is calmed. The disciples are amazed by his power and authority. You and I are baptized followers of Jesus. By virtue of our Baptism we are called to become the voice of Jesus, the hand of Jesus, the feet of Jesus, and the very heart of Jesus in this world. The question for our reflections this week is obvious. Is my faith asleep? Do I truly know, as a follower of Jesus, that our voice has power and authority? We, too, can calm a storm, but we need to speak like

and for Jesus: "Peace! Be Still!" Ask yourselves, is my faith active in the world or is it asleep deep within you?

The storms of life may blow about us, but it is not those exterior storms that pose the gravest danger. The furious storm outside may be overwhelming but what is going on inside can pose the far greater threat to our lives.

Unfortunately storms that rage within us cannot be cured by ourselves. It takes the power of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is our only hope of stilling the tempest that can harm our souls and cripple our lives.

That's what the disciples learned that day on the Sea of Galilee. They thought danger lies outside the boat. They would soon learn the real danger lies within the boat, within their own hearts. In a word, their faith was asleep. And without an active faith their lives are at risk to the storms which would inevitably come. And come they did, and come they will. So what can we learn from this boat ride in the storm?

First, we learn that storms can come up suddenly in our lives. Everything can be going beautifully, people can be congratulating you; things can be going your way. You are as they say, "In the pink." Then all of a sudden the telephone rings and everything in your life can be turned upside down. Your test results from the doctor are in, and all of a sudden you find yourself in the midst of a storm. It doesn't take long for the storms of life to come.

Amazingly, as this violent storm was taking place, Jesus was asleep. The disciples experienced it as we all do. That is when we go to the stern of the boat only to find Jesus asleep. He doesn't even know that a storm is raging. He can't even hear the howl of the wind. He doesn't even feel the waves crashing into the side of the boat. The water splashing all over his face doesn't disturb him in a bit. Doesn't Jesus care? We plead to God, "Don't you care if we drown? We ask ourselves, "Doesn't God care about what I am going through? The sudden furious storm outside may be overwhelming but what is going on inside can pose the greater threat to our lives. Who will calm the inner tempest? Who will the inner waves obey? Jesus says to our storms, "Quiet, be still!"

The second thing we learn from this boat ride in the storm is that we can lose our direction. So, why all the fear in this storm? For the disciples, I think this storm was like any other. They were fishermen who knew how to deal with storms. What I think is this: They are chastising Jesus for not pulling his weight. The disciples find Jesus asleep and they say, "*Teacher, don't you care if we are perishing?*" In other words, are you just going to sleep there or are you going to get up and help? They plead, get up and grab an oar Jesus; we need all hands on deck. Their faith is asleep.

It is at this moment that the unexpected happens. Jesus gets up. He does not

grab an oar. Jesus calms the storm. And this is why the disciples were terrified. Look at the story. The disciples are certainly frightened by the ferocity of the storm. They need everyone to pitch in but Jesus rebukes the storm, *“Peace, be still!”* The disciples are stunned. They were looking for human help. What they got was divine authority. They were looking for a hand. What they got was a God. They were terrified and asked each other, *“Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?”* The disciples haven’t a clue. Their faith is still asleep. *“Who then is this? Peace, be still.”*

My sisters and brothers in Christ, let me ask you, which would you fear, the storm or the one who masters the storm? It is here that the disciples lose direction. Jesus asks, *“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”* Here’s the thing, the disciples do not know who it is that rides in the boat with them.

Jesus asks them straight up, *“Have you still no faith?”* Do you still not understand who I am?” They were frightened during the storm but after the storm they were terrified. Why? Because of He who was in the boat. Their real problem is not the storm outside but the storm of doubt, unbelief, a sleeping faith and paralyzing fear on the inside.

So, let me ask you this question? Where do you turn in the midst of the storm? It is an urgent question. It is a theological question. In your unbelief, do you turn to a place to numb the fear? In other words, do you turn to an

addiction to get some kind of relief from the turmoil that churns within? Do you find that place in a bottle? Do you find that place in a casino? Do you find that place in the arms of someone other than your spouse? Do you find that place in an addiction to prescription and/or illegal opioids? So, what about our kids? Mighty storms rage within our children caused by relentless academic pressures, anxiety, separation and divorce in the family, depression, isolation, bereavement and substance abuse. I'm just saying that many of our students come to school with more than backpacks filled with books. When you combine these pressures at school with problems they are experiencing at home or with substance abuse, the raging storm is overwhelming. So, what are we as a church going to do about it? Holy Trinity Church has partnered with the Newport County Prevention Coalition to prevent underage drinking and substance abuse to a new generation of young people. Research indicates that religion increases protective factors such as self-control, personal virtue, and positive role models. Young people who attend church services are less likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or use illegal drugs. In addition, religion provides opportunities to gain leadership and coping skills as well as social ties.

You know, I do not believe that Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith in his ability to calm the storm. What I believe is that Jesus is

disappointed that they do not yet understand who He is. Their faith was asleep. If they understood who Jesus was, then they would not fear the sea.

So, here is our challenge for the week: When you find yourself in the midst of a crisis and the boat is sinking, does your faith turn you to Jesus Christ? If not, then where else are you going to go? Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only God is the Holy One. Only Jesus can calm the tempest. Only God delivers.

And that brings us to our third and final point. Storms can come suddenly.

They can make you lose direction. And if we do not understand who it is that is in the boat with us then our fear of the storm has the power to paralyze.

When Jesus awakened, he rebuked not only the storm but the disciples. “Why are you afraid,” he asked. “Have you no faith?” Now, let us be clear about this. The promise that is made to us is that of God’s presence, no more, no less. In the midst of the storm, God will be in the boat with you. You need not panic, though the situation may appear bleak. The Lord of the Church is in the boat with you. You need not forsake your faith and your witness because it is asleep. The Lord of History is in the boat with you. You need not become immobilized. The Lord of the storm is in the boat with you. That is the promise.

Will the clouds dissipate immediately? No guarantee. Will you no longer have

to struggle with life's many problems? It is never promised. Will you henceforth prosper; as the T.V. so called ministers assure you? Probably not. Well, you say, it doesn't sound as though the promise that is given is all that great a deal. Perhaps not. But, I say that promise got Noah through the storm and the flood. That promise got Moses and the Jews through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. That promise got a 15 year old betrothed Mary through her pregnancy. That promise got the incarnate Jesus through the crucifixion, and that promise will be sufficient to get you through that long dark night of the soul. My sisters and brothers, the Lord of the storm is in the boat with you saying to you, "Peace, be still!" Amen.