

“Peace, be still!” Pentecost 5B (Proper 7). June 24, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41.

35 On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to [the disciples], ‘Let us go across to the other side.’<sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.<sup>37</sup> A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.<sup>38</sup> But 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?’<sup>39</sup> He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.<sup>40</sup> He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’<sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

“Don’t you care that we are perishing?” “Let the Almighty answer me!” (Job 31:35). “How can this be happening?” The ancient cries of people in trouble are not so different from the cries of people today.

Start with the young person being bullied. Move to the parent worried about a teenager falling in with a gang. Move to a distracted driver being handcuffed in a sheriff vehicle’s back seat. Move to a couple seated in a doctor’s office hearing the worst. Move to a family gathered around a dying loved one. Move to a legislator terrified of crossing his or her political party. Move to a soldier in any of the warring places of the world. Move to a family uprooted by violence, journeying to what was hoped to be asylum, and ripped apart with no understanding of when or where or how reunion might occur.

These things all happened this week. “Don’t you care, Lord, that we are perishing?” “How can this be happening?”

We’ve heard the cries of the disciples in the boat. We’ve heard the lament of Job in the ancient tale. And we’ve seen and heard the sobbing of little children on our southern border and now scattered to the corners of our nation. Each of us carries a hidden struggle of some sort. Do we listen to one another?

My mother once embroidered a saying for her grandson. It read, "Oh Lord, be good to me: the sea is so wide and my boat is so small."

That's been how I have been feeling this week. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small. The waves are so high and my rowing ability is so weak. The fear is so deep and the faith is so shallow.

A respected pastor wrote a blog this week entitled, "Moving from fear to faith." I thought, that's quite a challenge. Ask a little child in Texas to do that. Ask a mother whose aching breasts are full of milk for a child taken from her. Ask the patient in the doctor's office. Ask the driver in the back of a police car. Ask me! Not possible.

It did happen, however, for both Job and for the disciples. They were moved from fear to faith. For Job, it was being put in his place in the eyes of the Almighty who simply asked, "Where were you when I made the world? How dare you challenge me!" For the disciples it was Jesus' words, "Peace, be still!" and the sea turning from storm to calm.

What would it take for the child in detention, for the soldier in battle, for the parent at 2 in the morning whose teenager hasn't come home? What would it take for you, for me, to know that "peace, which the world cannot give"?

We talked at some length this week in Bible study about this. We talked about how fear can both help us avoid trouble and cause us despair. Useful fear and despondent fear. Useful fear would help the crew row the boat more skillfully and strongly. Despondent fear would cause the crew to quit rowing.

The disciples were probably experiencing both kinds of fear. And, add to this, Jesus was asleep on the cushion! God asleep while they were perishing.

Of course, we know God is not asleep. It FEELS like God is asleep while we are wide awake to question and worry and despair.

Or do we prefer to close our eyes and ears to the despair around us. To pretend that our despair is really faith. To deny our illness, our brokenness in spirit, in body and in our body politic.

Lord, have mercy. Kyrie Eleison. Christ have mercy.

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And then God stretched out God's arm and healed Job, restored his life. Not because Job did anything about it. But because God did care for Job.

And God stretched out God's arm and calmed the storm, not because the disciples did anything about it or had faith. Simply because God – in Jesus – did care.

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How will God stretch out God's arm today and calm our storm? How will our soldiers, our border patrol, the families, the sick, the dying hear the words, "Peace, be still?"

How will fear change to faith? Again, the Bible study class to the rescue. We talked about how impossible it sometimes feels to turn our fear to faith and how, perhaps, yes, just perhaps, it is more often a case of having BOTH fear AND faith. Well, why not, if we are BOTH saints AND sinners, if we are BOTH children of God AND children of this earth....perhaps we can live with BOTH fear AND faith. I think that's what Jesus did on the cross. At the same time he was crying "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he was promising paradise to his dying neighbor. At the same time he was calling out in thirst and pain, he was seeing to it that his mother was cared for.

Perhaps that is possible for us as well. While we agonize about news stories, about brokenness in society, about our diseases and frustrations, we also move forward in faith to write letters, to seek treatment, to care for our loved ones, to build, to clean, to cook, to study, to keep rowing the boat in the midst of the storm. Olivia, our youngest member, is participating in a service project near the Texas/Louisiana border before the Youth Gathering to witness to her faith.

In the last few days and weeks, people of faith across the country and from many different religious traditions and of no tradition have spoken out and marched to declare that **Families Belong Together**. This week highlighted the conviction and power of faith communities to vigil, organize, march, pray, and demand justice. United

Methodists gathering at their Pacific Northwest Conference this weekend will issue a statement and vigil together at the Northwest Detention Center today. Officials have begun the process of seeking to reunite some families. Legislators seek to craft laws that will work and be just.

Fear and faith. A daughter sits by the hospital bed of her mother. A neighbor carries a batch of cookies to the people moving in next door. A person phones another to see how he is doing. A hand reaches out to a child. A soldier watches out for his colleagues. A family looks to the stars and wonders in awe about how and by whom they were made. A troubled soul reaches out for the small piece of bread and a sip of wine and feels God's comfort. Two people sit down over coffee and talk for a couple hours about their fears and their faith: not in so many words, of course, but **in reality that's just about all we have to talk about.**

Faith doesn't banish our fears, but it makes it possible to cope with them. We don't need or expect someone to walk on water, to still the waves, to smite the unrighteous or to magically make the troubles go away. But the relationships we enjoy, one with another, and between the Lord and ourselves – these relationships – this community -- make it possible to have faith, to cope.

Angels and prophets and our Lord have said, "Do not be afraid." David stepped out to challenge Goliath. The Good Samaritan stopped on the dangerous road to assist the fallen stranger. Young Mary, not yet married, brought forth a tiny child and raised him to become our Lord – and, by the way, fled to Egypt as a refugee to save his life. Martin Luther stood up against emperor and pope for the sake of the Gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer endured prison and execution, all the while trusting that his earthly end was "just the beginning of life." Moms and dads and grandparents and workers and retired people and aunts and uncles and neighbors find ways to make miracles on a daily basis. Caring for the difficult ones. Feeding the hungry kids. Giving out words of affirmation and care. Reminding us that our hands do God's work. Reminding us that "though the wrong be oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

God reaches out to you this morning in Word and at Christ's table. As you listen and as you receive Jesus. As you pray and sing. As you share the peace.

Brothers and sisters, do not despair. In the midst of your fears, God gives you faith enough for the day. Faith enough to see you through. Courage to act with righteousness and integrity, holiness of spirit, truthful speech and genuine love. For Jesus' sake, in the power of God. Amen.