

Wind and Waves

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It had been a long day. Jesus was teaching by the sea and the crowds were so huge that Jesus had to get into a boat in order to address them all. He spoke to them in parables – stories of seeds, lamps, plants and God’s kin-dome of love.

When evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose (cue wind), and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

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?’ 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. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ 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?’ AMEN

Prayer: Show us who you are, Lord Jesus. Open my mouth to speak your words, and open all our hearts to receive your love. AMEN

Our faith tradition is an oral tradition. The stories we read in the Bible were originally passed on from generation to generation through the spoken word. So thank you for helping make that story come alive.

I’m so drawn to stories like these. They have a way of sinking deep into our minds and our hearts. They are the ones you want to think about, to memorize, to pray over. The ones you want to take out and pore over like an old letter, noticing something new each time it’s read.

My sabbatical begins this afternoon. I am grateful to all of you for the support to take some time for rest and renewal. I will miss you and actually get a bit teary when I think about being gone for three months.

Stories like these are the reason I plan to spend some of my study leave learning the craft of storytelling. Story is how we communicate about God and one another. As Nancy Kachel reminded me this week, we **all** have a story. It has

been one of my greatest joys to learn your stories – your loves and losses, your triumphs and sorrows. And we are all a part of God’s great story of reconciliation and redemption in the world.

In August, I’ll head to the international festival of biblical storytelling, spend a day with a story-telling coach. Throughout the summer I plan to read and write. I hope to become a better storyteller, which will impact teaching and preaching, and my goal is to create a story-corp like project here – recording and archiving YOUR stories. Short pieces about significant experiences or relationships in your life.

So, back to the text.

Jesus commanding the wind and waves is found in all four gospels. It is a story we need to pay attention to – it’s also withstood the test of time.

It’s evening and Jesus invites his followers to “go across to the other side” of the Sea. Some commentators think that Jesus was looking for some rest and relaxation after a very long and busy day. But, “the other side” is where the Gentiles were, the strangers, the “other” – so for Jesus to instruct his friends to cross over, he is inviting them into something new and potentially life changing. It’s both exciting and terrifying before they even reach open waters.

Jesus continues to invite us into the unknown, into places of discomfort, new situations, new people -- because that’s where growth happens.

And so they go. And a sudden storm erupts – this is not an uncommon occurrence on the waters of the sea. But even the seasoned fishermen in the boat are scared.

Wind and storms and churning water would not have been new images for Jesus’ listeners. The ancient story in Genesis has God moving above the unsettled waters bringing order out of chaos.

In this gospel story, the disciples summon Jesus and probably say “Hey, dude! Get up! Don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” Jesus shows that he is God, and like the poetry of earth’s creation, brings order to chaos...

...and the disciples are in awe. Jesus has power – and still does today. Power to move us to greater love, understanding, compassion. Why did they doubt? Why do we?

The story has implications for the church.

In antiquity, the church was represented by a boat. As it was and is still today, Jesus calls the church to cross over to the other side. To find new ways of doing justice, loving kindness and living into our call to be Christ's hands in the world. And make no mistake – we are on the stormy sea. The winds could possibly be the Spirit, moving us, nudging us into greater faithfulness.

The church can and must find new ways to be faithful to Jesus in a culture where many dismiss the church as irrelevant or, even worse, harmful.

In the name and power of Jesus, we have hope. He's not asleep in the stern, but wide awake and leading us.

Last week, in the height of the disgrace and storm of children separated from their families at our borders, the 223rd General Assembly for the PCUSA began. I am proud to say that this denomination does not run from wind and waves, but calls upon Jesus for help. Bill shared about the declaration, and then a couple more:

The GA included a protest through St. Louis, to demonstrate against mass incarceration, and included an offering of \$47,000 to help pay bail to non-violent offenders who are languishing in jail. And last Saturday, before the executive order reversing it, stated clerk J Herbert Nelson issued a statement condemning the policy of removing immigrant children from their parents at the southern US border.

He writes:

...there is nothing of more urgency than the tragedy that is unfolding at our borders, where children are ripped from their parents and placed in holding cells, while their frantic parents scream in agony at the separation.

He concludes with words that echo the scripture from today:

In the name of God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stop!

At Oak Grove, the Spirit is moving boldly. We're praying and acting – we heard the incredible things the Green Team is up to, hunger ministry, etc. As many of our congregation members are at Pride this morning. I want to read a note that was written on a white board downstairs that I discovered in May: “I was here for a memorial service for our grandmother, and I was shocked at first to find a gay pride flag hanging next to the sign out front. Wandering down here has me so happy to find so many inclusive signs, accepting of all genders and sexualities, especially as a person coming from a small Iowa town where much of the LGBTQ community is treated as a joke. I may not be much of a religious person, but I am so glad to know that there are churches out there like this. With love.”

VBS is some of the best evangelism we do. Fifteen out of the 33 children who attended this week came from outside the church. And all the children were met with love and care by the adults who engaged them. (You KNOW we have the most gifted, amazing people here) One of our visiting children spent the night in Maplewood with a grandparent and insisted on coming to VBS for the final day.

And these children are a beautiful diversity. One of our children has a dad from Cuba, another a mom from Colombia. The mom came in and shared about living in Colombia – and even our wiggly three-year-olds were attentive and interested. Jesus is awake!

Second – the implications of this story for the individual.

In my first church staff position, my supervisor had a beautiful little piece of art in his office – a carving with a boat riding a swell, with the words, “Sometimes Jesus calms the storm, and sometimes Jesus calms the child within the storm.”

Perhaps some of you saw the article in the paper last week about Giving Voice chorus. It is singing group that brings together people with Alzheimer's and their care partners to sing, and fellowship, with the purpose of fostering joy, well-being, purpose and community understanding. Choruses meet in Minneapolis, and one in St. Paul.

Our own choir member, Deacon and awesome guy Al Greimel and his mom are part of the choir.

Last Saturday, the entire chorus – all 170 members -- performed a number of original pieces written and composed just for them at the Ordway. Composer Victor Zupanc (Zoo-pank) and poet Louisa Castner spent time with the members of the chorus, listened to their stories, and then wrote music that honored their struggles and triumphs, their loves and their losses.

The story of Jesus calming the sea was on my mind as I listened to the concert last weekend. Each musical piece was preceded by an intimate story from a member of the chorus, vulnerably sharing how disease and grace have touched their lives. I promise you, there wasn't a dry eye in the theater.

Toward the end of the concert, a tall, striking woman shared her story. She had beautiful memories about growing up on the coast of Maine, and sitting for hours in the crags and looking out at the Atlantic ocean. Surrounded by the rocks, she felt safe and secure. She looked for hours at the boats, the little dinghies that managed to stay afloat amidst the waves. So alone in the ocean. As her disease progressed, she remembered those little boats, and how with the changes in her life, she felt as though she was alone on her little dinghy. Lost, isolated. She had times when she was filled with doubt and that the clouds were covering her, bringing a storm. But then she started coming to Giving Voice, and singing, laughing and being with others helped her realize that instead of being isolated, she was surrounded by other dinghies. And it helped.

And so I close with the lyrics by Louisa Castner based on her story that Giving Voice sang so poignantly last week.

Ballad of the Dinghy

Today the waters are calmer.

Today the wind is not strong.

Today our friends all surround us.

Today we know we belong.

*Some days the waves are so choppy.
Some days we hit every rock.
Some days we pray for a lull.
Some days we long for the dock.*

*We live in this dinghy, this little boat of our life.
And all too often it's stormy,
The fog rolls in like a knife.
And in the hull of this dinghy,
We feel so all alone.
But when the clouds have lifted, this harbor full of other boats is home.*

*Today with family around us.
Today we know we are strong.
Today our friends all surround us.
Today we know we belong.*

Thanks be to God. AMEN