



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 23, 2024
JOB 38:1-11; PSALM 107:1-3,23-32; 2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-13; MARK 4:35-41

CHRIST IN THE STORM

Mark 4:35-41 [When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "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 windstorm arose, 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?"]

Wow, it's been a busy week for me. But I did get to spend a lot of time with two of my six grandchildren, so it's been a good week. On Tuesday evening, my husband, Mark, and I provided childcare support so their parents could go to the theater. Dominic is 11, and just graduated from 5th grade on Friday. Ariel is 8 and is a rising 3rd grader.

The talk of the evening was the movie *Inside Out 2*. The kids had seen the new release movie a few days earlier and they were eager to tell us all about it. If you have never seen the original movie, it's about a girl named Riley, and her personified emotions: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger and Disgust. These emotions and their accompanying memories form Riley's core personality. In the new

movie, Riley enters puberty and new emotions emerge: Anxiety, Envy, Embarrassment, and Ennui. The new movie provided great fodder for a rich dinnertime conversation about emotions. And the kids amazed me with their insights.

Ariel said, "Anxiety is when you worry about things that might happen in the future. But you never know if they will happen or not. It's better just to be in the present and not worry about the future." An eight-year-old's explanation of mindfulness. And a superb one at that. I need to follow her advice.

Dominic shared that his favorite personified emotion is Anger. This character is short, red, and voiced by comedian Lewis Black. He is given to frequent impulsive outbursts. "I like it when he gets angry and fire comes out of his head," Dominic said. We had a great discussion about anger. We talked about the last time we each got angry and agreed that that we all experience anger, and that it is neither good nor bad, it just is. What we do with our anger is key. As a group, we agreed that it is not OK to

yell, break things, or hit someone when we're angry.

Then Dominic shared an astute insight. "Sometimes, when I get angry, it's because I'm really scared" and he went on to tell a story about a friend who is going to a different middle school next year. Dominic was able to identify that he was feeling angry toward his friend because of his fear of loss. He is grieving. Sometimes, we become angry because we are really afraid.

There are a lot of emotions going on in our readings today, especially our Gospel. A sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee causes what sounds like anger toward Jesus. An anger that arises because the disciples are fearful that they might lose their lives.

"Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" It's not a question; it's an accusation. A ghastly, hidden terror that the disciples' dire circumstances pull to the surface. You *told* us to get into this boat, and now we're in deathly trouble. We followed you. We *trusted* you. Aren't you supposed to *do* something? Why are

you asleep? The only possible explanation is that you don't care."

I can't tell you how many times I have flung this accusation at God. How many times I've linked my suffering to God's apparent lack of care. "*Don't you care that I am perishing?*"

To be fair, the disciples' response to the sleeping Jesus has a rich and storied Biblical history. The Hebrew scriptures are full of such questions and accusations. Just read the Psalms. Where are you? Why won't you save us? How much longer? Rouse yourself, Lord! Why have you forsaken us?

I take refuge in this history because it means I'm in good company. It is not a sin to ask God hard questions. It's not unfaithful to wonder "Why?" or "When?" or "How much longer?" It's not wrong to be afraid; God has wired us to experience fear when we're threatened. Especially if we are threatened with loss.

The problem isn't fear; the problem is where fear leads. When I face fearsome circumstances, my go-to position is not trust or even curiosity; it's suspicion. In my fear, I conjure up a God who is stony-

faced, implacable, and loveless. A God to whom I am expendable. A God who withdraws. Once I've conjured that God, I withdraw, too. I curl up tight and focus on mere survival, convinced that I'm alone. All capacity for reflection and connection disappears.

But consider this: in Mark's story of the storm, the obvious fact is that Jesus is just as present in the raging water as he is in the soothing calm that follows. Despite the disciples' inability to perceive it, there is no point in the night when God is absent or even distant. In that vulnerable boat, surrounded by that swelling, terrifying water, the disciples are in the intimate company of Jesus. He rests in their midst, tossed as they are tossed, soaked as they are soaked.

We believe in a God who is intimately present to every human experience. I mean that. EVERY human experience. The Gospel today invites us to experience Christ *in the storm*. We are invited to believe that God goes before us into the darkest and most treacherous places we can imagine. We are invited to trust that Jesus cares even when we're drowning. We are invited to believe in the power of

Love even when Jesus appears to be sleeping.

I love the end of the Gospel story. Jesus waits until the horror is over before asking a very tender question. “Why are you afraid?” he asks. I don’t see this as an accusation. It’s an invitation to take stock, to reflect, to learn, to grow. Why *are* we afraid as Christians? What are we afraid of losing? Do we have to let go of a distorted image of God? Are we more interested in God being *with* us, or doing things *for* us?

After Jesus calms the storm, the stunned disciples ask the most important question of all: “Who is this man?” Indeed. Who *is* this man, this Christ, this God, who sleeps through storms, accepts our accusations, and offers us his quiet, mysterious presence in wild and wind-swept places? Who is this God who loves us in the chaos of our lives?

My friends, it’s after the vicious storm that the disciples recognize the holy in their midst. It’s after the boat fills with water that they are “filled with a great awe.” It’s after Jesus accompanies them in the chaos that they realize who he is. May the same be true of us.



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