

The Fourth Sunday of Pentecost – 2021

Job 38:1-11

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

Don't get me wrong, I don't want to be in storms. I am not a spiritual masochist. Suffering is not my idea of a great time. You are like me; you don't want to tempt God by making it appear that you are a spiritual rock of Gibraltar, that no amount of difficulty will ever force you to lose your balance as you stand on the Rock that does not move. Lieutenant Dan thought that he was in a throwdown with God. In the movie, *Forest Gump*, Lieutenant Dan had no humility in the face of God's power. "You call this a storm?" It's an endearing little scene but I beg you not to get your theology from Lieutenant Dan. I don't want to be in storms. That doesn't mean that it's not going to happen. I don't want to be in storms. That little bit of personal preference has about as much bearing on what should befall me as me saying that I don't want the sun to rise in the east. I'm not in charge. Neither are you.

I don't want to be in a storm. Real ones I enjoy. Rain and lightning and wind and thunder – I think that stuff is a kick, as long as they don't get too big; as long as my house stays on its foundation and the trees don't fall on the roof. Real storms that are real big, you can keep those. What if our nation were to find itself in a war, a life and death struggle with an enemy that had the desire and the means to destroy us? What if we experienced an economic collapse like the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression? What if your husband suffered a botched surgery and was in the hospital for months? What if pancreatic cancer struck your wife and God called her home in 30 days? Storms are no fun. We've been in one for a bit. What if the government pulled the rug out from under your small business, forcing you to lockdown, because running your business was a supposed health risk? Don't forget; people are suffering. Don't forget; storms are circling around folks all the time – divorce, addiction, unemployment, prison.

Jesus and His disciples were making their way across the Sea of Galilee. Because of the surrounding terrain, the Sea is known as darkly moody. So it was on this night. "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion" (Mark 4:37-38). Indifferent; the One in whom they placed so much trust, He seemed indifferent to their need, oblivious to their circumstance. Panic, self-pity, and bone deep doubt mingled in their hearts to form a cocktail of unfaith that spills from their mouth. "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).

It is a question that is freighted with an accusation. Have you ever prayed that way? Sadly, I have. You must not care. You either don't see the gravity of our situation or you don't care. In one sense, the alarm in their diction was warranted, grounded in reality. In another sense, a more important sense, it is way out of line. The threat was real. They may have thought, accurately, that their lives were in the balance, that an ultimate kind of disaster was near. Don't you care? I've been there, in that unhappy place. Feeling sorry for myself. Wanting aid and none seems to come. It is cowardly. The thought of it makes me ashamed.

Jesus rose from the place where He was and spoke. “Peace! Be still!” The Greek words are far more strident. Quiet! Spoken in as firm a tone as you can imagine. Remember: “By him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). When the great deep arose from His creative desire He said: “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). He speaks and the elements obey. His voice has authority in heaven and on earth. Quiet! Be still! In an instant, in only the time that it takes for the sound of the words to have drifted away, chaos turns to peace.

The Lord of wind and wave then turns to His disciples and delivers a rebuke: “Why are you cowardly? Do you not yet have faith?” That is a more accurate rendering of the Greek. “Why are you cowardly? Do you not yet have faith?” Cowardice tied to a lack of faith – it is a stinging rebuke from the Lord who sees their hearts. Brothers, none of us aspires to be a coward. Storms are coming – of multiple variety – to you and those you love. Will we be Richard the Lion-Hearted or more the OZ variety? Not one of us has *not* failed in the face of difficulty. We have all breathed accusations at the Lord about His lack of care. Men, you must be what God has called you to be. Storms are coming; the church, Christ’s church, is going to be challenged. Jesus said this: “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

We are small. God commands the cosmos. We command next to nothing. God became man in order to command our storms from the inside. He reveals Himself as true God and true man in our boat, in our earthly circumstance, in whatever we face. He is in charge. What He wills is always good. In the midst of storms, we are to learn – reliance, fortitude, courage, humility. Some storms we encounter are of our own making. The repercussions of our own sin creates chaos around us and we look for someone or something to blame. It is cowardly Christians who don’t repent, who don’t own up to their behavior, who don’t apply themselves to change. Is that me? Is that you? We all are to repent.

The corrective for cowardly behavior is not to “pull up your big-boys pants” but to look at the crucifix. It is not possible to look at the crucifix and accuse the Master: “Don’t you care?” The Lord Christ, heaven’s Prince, took upon Himself our humanity for the purpose of absorbing the chaos of sin and death in His all-powerful flesh, pouring out the peace of His perfectly divine blood. True God and true man, He gave His life for you. Blood mixed with prayer echoes still in the ear of our Creator: “Father, forgive them.” That is Jesus’ authoritative voice. The storm of death was stilled as the Lord Christ breathed His last. There is no chaos on this planet that can undo the peace of that everlasting moment. It is around you now. It is around you when you are afraid. It is around you when you lie down at night, when you rise in the morning, when you kneel at this altar and when you stand beside a new grave. Take heart! I have overcome the world.

When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were awestruck. They feared a great fear. “Who, then, is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). They knew that they were in the presence of God. This fear is a boon to courage, to faith, enabling us to discharge our calling as Christians – holding to His Word, keeping His commandments, loving our neighbor, forgiving our neighbor, serving our neighbor, speaking the Gospel to those who are enduring some storm. Here are similar words with the exact same sentiment: Who is this, who comes into

this Holy House to give us His body to eat and His blood to drink? Who is this, who will come on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead? Who is this, who shatters the tomb, who rises full of life, who opens heaven? Christ crucified and risen; faith and courage rise from Him.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They were in a heart-breaking storm. The storm of crucifixion had blown its hellish wind without any sympathy whatsoever and the Master was asleep. Asleep in death, laid in the hold of the tomb, the very stern of the earth; or so it was thought. The women go the tomb not to wake their sleeping Lord but to anoint His corpse. Their morbid errand was reversed. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen” (Luke 24:5). For those women, and for the world to come, a great calm covered the earth. Easter is our glassy Sea of Galilee. Jesus’ resurrection is the authoritative voice that settles every storm that we will ever face. To Him be glory, honor, thanks and praise forever and ever.