

June 24, 2018 Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan
Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

Mark 4:35-41

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the fourth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

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

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Today, Jesus cries out to the storm, saying, “Peace!”

This was the gospel we heard the first Sunday I stepped into this pulpit to preach. It was, in so many ways, a dream that the lectionary offered this gift for a first sermon among new people. A church who takes up the name of Peace... on the day that Jesus calls out “Peace” to save his friends from danger. I was so glad.

But then...on that Wednesday night before we were gathered for worship...a young man raised in an ELCA congregation...walked into Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina...and killed nine precious children of God as they gathered for Bible study.

And all of a sudden...the great storm felt much more real...and much more

frightening...and what it means for Jesus to call out, "Peace!" felt less certain. Because there was not peace that day. And we still wait and yearn and hope and cry out for peace now...

This is a wonderful word of good news...and yet...a hard one...because we may still feel we are waiting to experience the salvation the disciples received that day.

So many details of this gospel might catch our attention and our hearts.

New Testament Professor Matt Skinner points out one that I confess has often escaped my attention...though it may seem be one of those things that is painfully obvious once we say it. When the disciples fear for their lives in this storm...we might remember that many of them know their way around a boat. The Sea of Galilee was familiar territory. It was their living to know that water and its weather. If they were afraid...it wasn't because they were wimps. It was because this storm was really ready to swallow them whole.

This was a great storm. Matched only in magnitude by the calm that followed Jesus' command...and by the awe...and even fear that the disciples felt...now not because of the storm...but because of the power they witness in Jesus. Our translation calls their response to Jesus awe...but others describe it as terror. These people, who are still coming to understand who they are following, witness his power...and they are shaken.

Sometimes when we come close to the power of God...even when it is the power that saves us...it is terrifying.

Today as much as those many years ago in that boat on that stormy sea...we may feel the disciples' question in our hearts, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus, don't you care that your children are suffering? Are you asleep somewhere? Do you care?

Where are you when the car crashes...when the child cries out alone...when the grip of mental illness closes in...when the storm waters rise...when the LGBTQ child is met with rejection instead of love and affirmation...when the Bible study erupts in gunfire?

There are those we don't expect to really care. They often even advertise their indifference. But not God. God is supposed to care. Is God asleep somewhere?

If so...what does it look like when God wakes up and hears the cries?

First...as odd as it may seem...I think it matters today where it is that Jesus is when he falls asleep. Today, as in so much of Mark, Jesus makes camp in places that are in between...in transitional, liminal spaces...in borderlands...in places where life and death sit side-by-side. Jesus has fallen asleep on the Sea of Galilee...a place that separated one people from another.

Again, Dr. Skinner points out this preference Jesus has for the places that are not in the middle of everyday life...but at the edges... he goes "near a graveyard and to a deathbed in Mark 5. He goes to geographical borders, like the wilderness in Mark 1, mountaintops in Mark 3, Tyre in Mark 7, and Caesarea Philippi in Mark 8. He goes to the social margins, too, to politically charged places like a tax collector's home in Mark 2 and the land outside of Jerusalem during Passover in Mark 11." And finally...he goes to the shamed edge of the city...outside the walls...to Golgotha...and to the cross.

Jesus walks right up to the boundaries...and across them. He doesn't come to toe the line...He comes to defy its power. He cares too deeply about the fate of all people...of all creation...to let the lines we draw between people and places stand. I had a teacher in seminary who often reminded us, that if we were ever tempted to draw lines between ourselves and others...that we should be prepared to find Jesus on the other side of our lines.

Jesus cares so much for each one of us who is perishing, that when his disciples come to him to ask that very question, he doesn't even answer it (as far as we know)...at least not with words. His first waking act is not to tell us that he cares, but to show us.

Jesus really does care. And his power is as great as any storm...and he will continue to roam the borderlands looking to show us that the people and places on the edges of our minds, lives and hearts matter...that we matter when we are the ones who are on the edges.

So this week...three years after nine precious children of God lost their lives at Bible study...in the midst of the storm that continues in our world and so many of our lives...I suppose I am left with a lingering question...

How then, shall we live as followers of Jesus in the midst of the storm?

How shall we live in a world where Jesus cares...and suffering continues? How shall we live as followers of Jesus when he is walking to the boundaries and borders? How shall we live when we are so like the disciples...wavering in faith, and still wondering if we are dying?

Is this a time for which we were made? Can we follow Jesus to the forgotten and unloved places...to the places seen as unimportant or desolate...and hold them in love? Can we be raised up as the Body of Christ that will call out with a powerful voice into the storm, commanding peace? Not gentle, meek, soft-spoken peace...but roaring, world-shaking and re-shaping peace? Can we be the Body of Christ woken up from sleep and moved to action?

I think our youth and adult leaders leaving soon for national youth gathering in Houston to meet with 30,000 other Lutherans will see answers to this question...You will be called to the edges of what you know...and will see Christ at work in new and powerful ways.

Can we be the Body of Christ woken up from sleep and moved to action? I think we have seen answers to this question before...throughout history...sometimes when it has been 'yes' and sometimes... 'no...' because sometimes when we come close to the power of God...even when it is the power that saves us...it is terrifying.

So, what does it look like now, when God wakes up and hears the cries in the storm? Maybe it looks like the church rising. (Maybe it looks like others beyond what we often call the church rising, too, and leading...sharing in holy work.)

I know that Jesus loves us enough to stay beside us even when we falter in our trust and understanding, like the disciples did that day. He didn't just ditch them when they got to shore. I know we won't be forgotten or left behind. But I

also know that we can only begin to imagine what is possible when we rise up and become who we truly are...who we have been created to be.

Body of Christ. Christ is risen. So we shall arise.

Let it be so. Amen.