

“In Storms That Rage, Let Faith Engage”

[2 Corinthians 6:1-13](#); [Mark 4:35-41](#)

June 23, 2024 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – St. Paul UCC, New Bremen

Sermon Preached by Rev. David Voll, Interim Pastor

A young mother was flying with her baby daughter. The woman’s father was there to see them off and help with the baby while mom dealt with luggage and boarding passes. Standing in line waiting to check their baggage, she was still holding the baby’s pacifier. When she lifted the suitcases to the scale, in order to have both hands free she unconsciously put the pacifier in her mouth. It was then that she noticed a flight attendant staring at her with that pacifier in her mouth. Finally the flight attendant, feeling sympathy for the woman, said..... “Uh, excuse me, Miss, is this your first flight?”

I’m sure many of us have been on flights during which the turbulence was so bad that it was really rocking the plane. If so, we might better appreciate the situation the disciples faced when a terrible storm came up on the Sea of Galilee. As we read, the wind and the waves threatened to swamp their boat. And remember that some of these disciples were seasoned fisherman – so it must have been a ferocious storm if even they were afraid and thought they might die! They were so frightened they woke Jesus, who was sleeping on a cushion, and asked, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Perhaps many of us have asked a question like this at some point, when troubles we can’t control seem to be tossing our insides to and fro. Jesus seems inattentive and we want to ask, “Why are you asleep? Don’t you care?”

Everybody goes through storms in life. We’ve all had to navigate them: sickness or accidents; job difficulties; family members that disappoint or hurt us; personal failures; unmet hopes and dreams; financial troubles; a tough stretch in a marriage – besides the tempests in the world: warfare, extreme weather, political and religious divisions – all causing fear, worry, and doubt.

A loved one’s death can be a terrible storm to endure. A young widow, whose husband had just died, was left to care for their three small children. Shortly after his death, her 6-year-old son burst into the house after school, so excited about something he had to tell his mom. He said, “Mom, I just thought of something today. Daddy is so lucky. He gets to see Jesus now!”

Yes, how true!

On this same theme, Robert Schuler said it like this in his book, “Peace of Mind Through Possibility Thinking.....”

“Avoid...words that are intrinsically and relatively negative. ‘Lost’ is such a word. I recall as a young pastor writing to a friend to express my sympathy upon the death of his wife. I used that word ‘lost.’ He replied with customary courtesy, but his answer vastly affected me. ‘My dear wife’s death is a loss to me, but she is not lost. She’s gone, but I know exactly where she is.’”

When we have to endure the storm of a loved one’s death, this is the hope and the promise of our Christian faith. We know where they are! There are no more storms for them to endure; and they get to see Jesus now!

But no matter what the storm is in our life, its impact is even worse when we sometimes feel that through it all, Jesus seems to be asleep. We cry out in our distress, “Where’s God? Why doesn’t God do something?”

The Africans & African-Americans enslaved in our nation before 1863 asked the same questions. While praying to a seemingly absent God, many would scream their anguish into a bucket of water so as not to be heard. The Emancipation Proclamation and Juneteenth were the answer to those prayers.

In one of my favorite songs, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,” the late songwriter Gordon Lightfoot asks, “Does anyone know where the love of God goes, when the waves turn the minutes to hours?”

The disciples were in the same boat – pun intended! “Where’s God? Where’s God’s love now?” That’s the unanswerable question, isn’t it? Like the disciples, we ask God, “Don’t You care?”

A minister was asked to pray during a meeting when a very violent thunderstorm came up outside. As the skies opened, the heavens roared, and the windows rattled, the pastor prayed, “God, send us the spirit of the child-rem of Israel, the children of Moses, and the children of the Promised Land.”

Then one of his parishioners prayed with a bit more of a practical heart. “Lord, this ain’t no time for sending children. You better come Yourself!”

How often have we wanted God to come down personally, to give us that special assurance that He knows what we’re going through, that our grief & heartaches matter, that He sees, that God’s aware, and that He understands!?

Well, God did come down, sending a part of Himself, a gift of love, from God’s very source of being. God became “love with some skin on it” in the person of Jesus Christ. God in Christ is not hindered by some rough seas. So today’s Gospel text affirms that yes, God in Christ does care! When the storms of life are raging, God does care. When it seems you can’t hold on a moment longer, God does care. When we need Him to stand by us, God does care. When the waters threaten to overtake, God does care!

So the disciples rouse Jesus from his sleep and he speaks, saying to the wind and the waves, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceases, and there’s calm. Turning to the disciples, he asks, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

Hear this – no matter what your situation, the good news is: Jesus is awake and continues to encourage you. When you’re going through or you will go through a stormy time in life, he can give you hope to hang in there, to see you through to the other side of the storm. No matter what, he’s on the case!

That’s good to know because the central question in life isn’t how many storms we pass through. The question is whether we have faith for those storms. So it’s at such times that a firm foundation of faith is critical.

Do you believe in a God who loves you and has promised never to forsake you? Do you believe that however dark the clouds, behind them the sun still shines? Do you believe that beyond every cross, there’s an empty tomb?

If you do, you can weather the storm – no matter how severe. And if you’re unsure about your belief in these things, then this is a good day to begin working toward that faith for yourself. No one else can do it for you.

Author William Gibson tells how after his mother’s death he yearned for the great faith that had strengthened her during her life, the same faith that had upheld her during her courageous dying. So he took his mother’s gold-rimmed glasses & her faded, well-worn Bible and sat in her favorite chair. He opened the Bible because he wanted to read what she had read. He put on her glasses because he wanted to see what she had seen. He sat

in her place of prayer and devotion because he wanted to feel what she had felt. He wanted to experience what had so deeply centered and empowered her.

But nothing happened. It didn't work.

I'm not surprised. He needed a faith of his own – not his mother's faith.

There's a saying: God has no grandchildren. God wants to be your God. You don't get your parents' faith by osmosis or heredity. Sure they can set an example or inspire you, but you have to practice it.

Do you have a faith you can call your own? When the storms of life rage, does your faith engage?

When I consider such questions, especially in light of this Gospel text, I often think of a hymn written by Thomas A. Dorsey (not the Tommy Dorsey of big band fame). He wrote it in 1932 in response to his inconsolable bereavement at the deaths of both his wife, who died giving birth to their son, and that same newborn son. Perhaps you know it:

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.

The disciples, during that terrible storm, must have felt something like this. So did Paul and other apostles, who in a storm of controversy in the early church urged the Corinthian Christians to not accept the grace of God in vain and instead recognize that God's unmerited love and mercy are always there.

And I'm sure most of us have felt something similar in our lives. When we feel like our boat is being swamped, causing a tempest inside of us that can be even more overwhelming, the best we can do is to rely on God's grace, God's presence, and the faith we've nurtured all these years. That's why I believe we need to worship together week after week, so our faith reserve is deep enough when we need it most. We need to tell ourselves, as my sermon title states, "In storms that rage, let faith engage!"

Or maybe one of these alternative sermon titles I came up with resonates with you:

In Stormy Seas, Let Faith Be Seized!
In Storms You Face, Let Faith Be Embraced!
In Storms You Resist, Let Faith Persist!
During Storms and Rain, Let Faith Be Sustained!
'Til The Storm Be Past, Use Faith That Will Last!
During Storms In The Night, Let Your Faith Shine Bright!

However, you say it, when you engage your faith, I pray that you'll learn to find that voice, to hear that voice – the voice that calms the storms within your soul and helps you find a blessed quietness in your spirit. "Peace," that voice will say, "I'm here... and I'm awake. Peace. Be still." Amen.