

Pentecost 4B 20 June 2021
Mark 4:35-41
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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?" Let's pray:

Dear brothers and sisters, let me tell you that large waves are terrifying! There are waves in the Bass Strait that are so big they can pick up large, steel cargo ships and snap them in half. The most skilful ships' captains have to navigate the ocean so that they don't end up with both bow and stern sitting on the crests of sequential waves with nothing to support the bulk of the ship in the middle. There's a good reason why many mighty, ocean-going vessels have been designed on the ancient ship building technology of Noah's Ark.

But our gospel lesson today is not primarily about the boat and the storm; it's as much a story about something far more tempestuous - the human soul.

These are stressful times for Christians. The pace and types of change challenge the things that we hold to be dear and true. Humanism, ignorance of history, indifference, cancel culture, corruption, and the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I, stand diametrically opposed to the openness and very nature of the unity and community of the Church and her Holy Trinitarian God. Uncertainty is everywhere, sin and evil rage giving rise to storms and waves that threaten to sink the ark of the Christian Church.

And our response to living with the brokenness of sin, with all the storms of this sinful world, is to cry out for some peace to somehow insulate, or protect us from all the fury around us. We search, dream, long for peace in the midst

of the fury of life. We crave that peace. We call out as the disciples did to Jesus in that sinking boat. We call out to the same Jesus for peace, for comfort, for reassurance. We call out to Jesus, wondering if he is still around, wondering if he is asleep at the helm while we struggle. To which Jesus calmly replies, “Peace! Be still!”

“Peace! Be still!” Jesus says to our souls. Are you serious, Jesus? Don’t you know what I’m going through? My life is a wreck! My finances are in free-fall. Don’t get me started on my health! I get one thing fixed, and then something else goes wrong. There’s just one thing after another. I have exams coming up. I can’t get a job. My husband is sick. My child is dying. I’m lonely. I’m depressed. My friends are fickle. Then there’s what’s going on in the news. Where is God in all this? Asleep at the helm? Doesn’t he watch over his people? Doesn’t he watch over me? And you say to me, “Peace! Be still!” Come on, Jesus. Get real!

The question asked most often by human beings is always some variation on this theme: “Where are you, God?” “God, are you sleeping?” “God, can you hear me?” “God, why don’t you answer me?”

Well, let’s get real. Because it would be just wishful thinking if we had no basis in reality for singing hymns like “Be still, my soul”, or “Nearer my God to Thee”, or “It is well with my soul.” That would just be happy talk, whistling past the graveyard, if there were nothing to base our confidence on. But dear friends, there is a real basis for us to say to our souls, “Be still.” And that’s because we do have a Lord who says to the storms of our life – even to physical storms – “Peace! Be still!” So, I am keeping it real when I say to you, “Stay calm, Jesus is still in the boat.”

God is here with us. God is definitely awake. God does hear us, loud and clear. And God does answer us. God’s answer, God’s only answer to all of our searching questions, all of our accusations, all of our anxieties, all of our cries for help is this: “I am still in the boat with you through the crucifixion of Jesus. Yes, I am here. I am with you just as I was with my Son on the cross of Calvary.”

Saints, you know that Jesus can control your storms because he handled the storm of the cross! He trusted, Abba, Father, even when God seemed to forsake him. He faced a storm of whips and nails and ridicule, fully trusting in God. He knew what had to be done and he did it. But even that storm didn't take his life, because Jesus willingly gave up his life to deliver us from our storms. Even the final storm of death can't destroy you because Jesus stilled it forever by his resurrection! Faith is knowing for certain that Jesus is always in our boat, and even if it looks like he's sleeping, he's not. We are reassured by [Psalm 121] that he's the God who helps us; he's the God who protects us, and he's the God who will never slumber nor sleep. We know that he's the God who either stills our storms or carries us through them.

Friends, the Creator is still at work in his creation and our Lord promises that not even the gates of hell will prevail against his Church [Matthew 16:18]. We can look past the storms that batter our lives. We can look beyond the uncertainty, the fear and confusion of being tossed around and smashed up on the rocks by a sin affected creation. We can because we are the Church. We are the Body of Christ. We are grafted into the olive tree [Romans 11], the solid foundation, the anchor of peace, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, in whom we have in every age, a hope and a future. As challenged as our faith may become, even in the face of death, we are by his grace, and as part of his living body, as unsinkable as Jesus.

Now, I know that faith is difficult to define, yet, it's what saves us! It's not the faith we have in ourselves, it's the faith that looks to God even when Jesus appears to be sleeping. If it's faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, you're saved. If it's a giant faith that never wavers, you're saved. Faith is trusting that Jesus is with us in the ship, that he controls the storms, and even if the storm takes your life, you will live forever. Sometimes we have to say with the father of a sick child, "I believe, help my unbelief!" and know that God doesn't leave us on our own to find faith, but he gives it to us and sustains it in us.

"Peace! Be still!" is both a gentle invitation and an authoritative command based on Jesus' unconditional love for us and a demonstration of his power over evil. When Jesus says, "Don't be afraid", he means don't listen to the wild, racing feelings of your own hearts and minds, but to the sure and certain promises of God's Word. This, here and now, is the greatest gift in worship

and our relationship with Jesus, our living God. Simply being still. Hearing the Word of the Lord. Receiving God's peace that he gives through his Word and Sacraments.

Think about the very next thing that is said following the Words of Institution: "The peace of the Lord be with you always." This isn't just a greeting, a warm fuzzy from me to you; nor is it wishful thinking. This is the same peace that Jesus spoke to calm the storm. This is the peace that comes from the body and blood of Christ given and shed for you for your forgiveness. This is the peace that is truly present to us in Jesus, every bit as much as he was physically present with his disciples in that boat two thousand years ago. This is the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, and it will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.