

"Storms Will Come"

Texts: Genesis 37:1-4,12-28

Romans 10:5-15 (Series A, 10th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 105:1-6, 16-22, 45

Matthew 14:22-33

Let us pray:

You may have heard the story about a man who gets too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon, loses his balance, and slips over the edge. Just before falling 1000 feet, he grabs on to a root sticking out from the edge. "Help me!" He calls. "Is there anyone up there? Help me! Save me! Is there anyone up there?"

A voice answers, "I am the Lord. I can save you. Do you believe in me? Do you really want me to help you?" "O, yes, Lord, I believe in you, more than you'll ever know. Please help me." "OK," the Lord says. "I'll save you. Now, let go." "What?!" "Just let go of that root you're holding on to, and I'll save you. You have to trust me."

The man pauses a moment, and then shouts out, "Is there anyone else up there?!" Where does our faith fit in during the most difficult times, the times of testing, the times of storms? There are some who say:

- if you have faith, life will be smooth sailing.
- if you have faith, God will cure all your ills and guard you from every danger...
- if you have enough faith, if you stay close to God....

In our Scripture reading this morning from Matthew, we discover that that is not necessarily true. Last week we read the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000. We remember, the crowds had gathered to hear Jesus, and as the day wore on, Jesus tells the disciples, "Give the people something to eat."

They are stunned! Their immediate response is, "We don't have enough! All we have are two little fish and five small loaves of bread. Jesus said, "Give the food to me."

They do, Jesus blesses it, and told the disciples to pass it out. They do, everyone eats their fill, and there are even 12 baskets full left over! What do you imagine the disciples thought about all that? They were right in the middle of that miracle. Maybe some in the crowd didn't realize what had happened, but the disciples were right there, all the way through it. They participated in the miracle.

After the feeding of the 5,000 is all over, Jesus dismisses the crowd and send them home. Then he tells his disciples, "Get in the boat and cross the lake. I'll join you later, but right now I need to be alone for awhile to pray."

Well, a few hours later we find the disciples caught in the middle of the lake in a wind storm. The waves are rolling, the wind is blowing. And they are getting nowhere. It takes everything they have just to try to keep the boat into the wind, let alone make it across to the other side.

Now, remember: Why are they out in the middle of the lake in the first place? Jesus told them - or commanded them - to get in the boat and cross the lake. They are doing exactly what Jesus had told them to do, and by being obedient to him, discover themselves now caught in a big storm!

Do **faith** and **obedience** always mean smooth sailing in life? Apparently not. Sometimes we follow Jesus, and it leads us into a storm! Finally, in the wee hours of the morning before first light, Jesus comes walking out to them, actually walking on the water!

The disciples' initial reaction is one of fear. They're terrified! "It's a ghost!" they say. But then Jesus calls out, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." For whatever the reason - maybe he needed proof or something – Peter blurts out, "If it's really you Lord, command me to come out on the water with you."

Jesus answers simply, "Come... come on, Peter." It would be like letting go of that root that you're hanging on to for dear life. At this point, Peter is probably ready to call out, "Uh, is there anyone else up there?" But Peter is caught. It's do or die. So, he cautiously puts one leg over the boat, then the other, still holding on to the boat.

He lets go with one hand, and then the other, and there is Peter, walking on the water, too! Impossible? Waah! This is more exciting than feeding 5000 with a small lunch! Contrary to all the laws of nature, the impossible is happening – because the Lord of the universe is there. But then something happens to Peter. It's almost as if he woke up and realized where he was

Well, here is Peter, walking on the water toward Jesus. Everything is fine, but then he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to look around. And what he sees are big waves and a driving wind, and there he is in the middle of it, unprotected, without a life jacket. He becomes afraid, and he begins to sink.

In desperation, Peter cries out, "Lord, save me!" Have you ever been there before? It is the elemental cry of every human being when we are confronted with that which is:

- beyond our strength,
- beyond our ability,
- beyond our control.

In the midst of our helplessness and powerlessness, we cry out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reaches out and grabs hold of Peter, pulls him up and helps him back into the boat. "Why did you doubt, Peter? Where is your faith? Didn't you believe me? Didn't you believe me when I told you to let go?" Suddenly the wind dies down, the waves settle. The disciples are filled with awe and amazement declaring, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

What really is the lesson here? Yesterday, just before the picnic Sheryl Kenner asked me what I will be speaking on, I said Peter walking on water. The topic opened up a lively discussion. And Sheryl said something that is very profound, in a nut shell. "When we don't focus in living in the **now**, and rather focus on the future about what might or might not happen that is when we begin to sink".

As I hear God speaking this morning through the Scriptures, what I hear is the Lord saying to Peter and the disciples and to all of us reading this sermon:

Life is full of *adventures* and *encounters* and *accidents* and *experiences* that remind us over and over again - if our eyes are open enough to see it - that God alone is God, and we are totally dependent upon God as our source of *life* and *hope* and *strength*. And even when we are certain that God is leading us and we are acting according to God's will, we dare never think that we can go at it alone, relying exclusively upon our own resources and abilities.

Peter only did what the Lord invited him to do. He was actually doing the impossible, by worldly standards. It was only when he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the storm raging around him that he began to sink. Jesus told us, "Without me, you can do nothing....but with God, all things are possible."

I'm sure Peter never forgot that moment. There were still other times of doubt and testing in his life, and he wasn't always successful, but whenever he struggled he always ended up crying out, "Lord, save me! And the Lord was always there to reach out and save him. He always found the help and the strength he needed.

Life is full of *adventures* and *encounters* and *accidents* and *experiences* that remind us over and over again that ultimately we are completely dependent upon God for our *life*, our *hope*, our *salvation*. Ultimately, finally, we discover that there isn't anyone else up there, and the only choice we have is to let go, and let God work his will in our lives.

As a congregation of God's people, we often are faced with opportunities to let go and let God's will be done in our midst.

- Every time we bring a little baby to the waters of Holy Baptism,
- Every time we gather around the table of the Lord,
- Every time we adopt a budget and decide how to spend the money God has entrusted to us,
- Every time we face a new challenge, a new opportunity for ministry,
- Every time we gather at a funeral to mark the passing of one of God's faithful servants,

We face again and again the temptation to doubt and falter, to focus on the storms that rage around us, or to focus instead upon Jesus, the Lord of life, the Master of the winds and the waves. *Krista* once said something so profound during our Bible that “Christianity is a relationship of living in the **here** and **now**.”

We do know that Christ is calling us forth as his people, and God invites us to trust him, to let go and let God. And so, we go from here, seeking to be God's faithful people, trusting and depending on our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, always keeping our eyes focused on the One who is our source of life, hope, and salvation.

Jesus calls - *requires* - us all to be out of the boat to get our feet wet in the realities of life's unpredictable times, tides, and weather. Nothing easy about it - just ask Peter. But praying for the trust to believe in our hearts, to speak our faith out loud in words and actions and bring Christ to others, will help us find the strength we need to pull ourselves and each other up from that sinking feeling of fear and doubt. Jesus bids us *Come*, step out in faith, and together we will know and share the calmer seas of the Good News.

A prayer from the service for Evening Prayer: goes like this: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the endings, by paths as yet un-trodden, through perils unknown.

Faith is... ceasing to worry, leaving the future to the God who control the future. Give us faith to go out with good courage, Not knowing where we go, But only that your hand is leading us, And your love supporting us; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Truly you are the Son of God.*" Amen

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Beautiful Saviour # 838
- My Faith Looks Up to Thee # 759
- Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me # 767

Happy birthday and Happy wedding anniversaries to all individual celebrating this special day in August 2020