

"Storms Will Come"

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

Romans 10:5-15 (Series A, 7th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 105:1-6, 16-22, 45

Matthew 14:22-33

Let us pray:

What happens if you're playing baseball or soccer and don't heed the coach's advice to keep your eye on the ball? What happens if you're hammering in nails and lose focus on the task? In any of those cases you're likely to mess up what you're doing at best, and at worst could actually get hurt. When you're dealing with a dangerous task, whether you're chopping with a knife or driving a car, you want to stay focused so that you can do the job well and safely.

Jesus had a powerful lesson to teach his disciples that night on the Sea of Galilee. Your faith like, like every other component of your life, needs focus. Without focus, there is no faith. Faith's most basic definition is trust, but if our trust is scattered all over the place, it doesn't actually trust in anyone or anything. Jesus encourages us, *keep our faith in focus*.

How do we handle the most difficult times in our life, 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. This Gospel follows the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000. We remembered, Jesus told the disciples, "Give the people something to eat."

Their immediate response was, "We don't have enough! All we have are two little fish and five small loaves of bread. That's not enough! Jesus said, "Give the food to me." Jesus blessed it and gave it the disciples to pass it out. Everyone ate their fill, and there were 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 event was all over, Jesus dismissed the crowd. 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 - 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." Vaer ikke bange* For whatever the reason - maybe he needed proof – 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 things we hang 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! "With God, all things are possible!" 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 is.

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.

The name "Peter" means rock. But now instead of being a solid rock of faith, he's sinking like a rock. 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. Falling to their knees they declare, "Truly you are the Son of God!" We often lose the focus of our faith, when we focused more on the problems than the solution. At times perhaps we're more interested in showing off our faith rather than showing off the one we believe in.

As we hear God speaking to us this morning through the Scriptures, what we hear is the Lord saying to Peter and the disciples and to all of us: Life is full of *adventures* and *encounters* and *accidents* and *experiences* that remind us over and over again - if our eyes are open to see it - that God alone is God, and we are totally dependent upon the Lord 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 solely upon our own resources and abilities. In times of storms, as we sink into our own seas, Jesus grabs us by the hand. As he pulls us up, we're reminded that while we have lost focus, Jesus has not.

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.*"

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 / adult 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 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. 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.

We have been forgiven for those times we have not trusted God, we have been forgiven for the times we have been more focused on our problems than his solutions. "*You of little faith,*" he says to each of us, "*Why do you doubt my love for you? Why do you doubt my ability to protect and help you? Why do you doubt my forgiveness?*"

And we have no answer because there is no reason to doubt. Jesus is faithful in his love as the covenant-keeping God, *I AM*. Jesus is faithful in his ability to protect as the one who has all power to work all things for our good. Jesus is faithful in his forgiveness because he paid for our sins, even our *doubts* and *distractions*, so they are no more than a distant memory.

Are we worried about the future? Focus on our Savior, who will be there to help us, no matter what storms may arise. Find that focus in his Word, which reminds us of the unending love and forgiveness for us all

And so, we go from here, seeking to be God's faithful people, Lord, help us to keep our focus on you today, tomorrow, and forever, trusting and depending on you our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, always keeping our eyes focused on the One who is our source of *life, hope, and salvation*.

A prayer from the service for Evening Prayer: goes this way: 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.

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.*" "*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.*" *Vaer ikke bange Amen.*