

5 Pentecost Mark 4:35-41
Christ and Grace June 24, 2018
Robin Teasley

Most of the time, I love a good thunderstorm. But as I was trying to fly home from St. Louis on Friday, I was rethinking this. Due to multiple delays, which were for our safety, I finally arrived at home around 2 AM on Saturday.

When I am safely on the ground, I like hearing storms off in the distance, knowing they are on the way. I love the unmistakable scent of rain in the air as I watch the tree leaves flip upside down as the wind picks up. Watching the clouds gather and darken is exciting!

I know that not everyone feels this way. In fact, many people are very afraid of storms. This was pretty evident on the plane Friday evening. When the pilot announced that Atlanta was not letting planes land due to storms, and that we would be circling for a while and might even be diverted to another airport (but that we had plenty of fuel), the anxiety level became palpable. The flight attendants were suddenly busy bringing those little bottles of liquor down the aisles to tense passengers. And when we were finally cleared for landing, the descent felt like a ride at Busch Gardens, as we dipped this way and that, up and down, and when we landed we hit the runway so hard I was amazed the wheels didn't fall off. As all this was happening, the people sitting on either side of me were gripping the armrests and exclaiming prayers and other less devout comments out loud. There we all were, in that large sky boat, tossed about by the wind and the water of the storm. I am certain that at least one of us was thinking about today's Gospel and wondering if we might perish!

Even though I like storms now, when I was a child, I didn't. At the first hint of one I would become very afraid. But I remember one night, as the long, low rumbles of thunder began in the distance; my father scooped me up in his arms and took me out onto the screened porch. There we sat, observing the approaching storm. As I was held safely in his strong arms, he explained to me all of the science and physics of a storm – what was happening, why it was happening, and what to expect next. We timed the space between lightning and thunder, we listened to the rain moving across the trees towards us, and then noticed as it moved on, the sound becoming fainter, then fading in the distance. Enfolded in my father's wisdom and strong arms, I could trust that I was safe, and my fear of storms died down in the same way as the wind and rain, which had moved on to other dry, parched places. I have loved storms ever since.

Storms in nature do bring fear, and rightly so. The aftermath of hurricanes, tsunamis, and tornados takes years of cleaning up and rebuilding. Storms are uncontrollable and that may be what we fear the most about them. Storms happen. We will find ourselves in a storm. Perhaps the important thing to remember is that we do not have to be alone. Having someone we trust with us determines how we will weather the storm.

Storms in our lives can bring fear as well. They can be more destructive than a natural storm, and can last even longer. They are just as uncontrollable and may be more unpredictable. Storms like job loss, a failed marriage, wayward children, the death of a loved one. I am sure that

together we could come up with a very long list of the storms we have weathered. And then there are the storms of poverty, abuse, hunger, and injustice. It's a stormy world.

How is it that we have been able to weather all these storms? Take a moment, right now, to look up. What do you see? Wood. Planks of wood and crossbeams. The part of the church where you are sitting is called the nave, which comes from the Latin word *navis*, which means ship. Today, as you sit in the nave and look up, notice that the ceiling of the nave looks remarkably like a boat turned upside down. A boat with a cross for a mast has long been a Christian symbol. Some of us have been in this boat a long time, and some of us have come aboard only recently. It doesn't matter. The important thing is that we are all in the boat together. When the storms come, in nature or in life, we are not alone in our boat.

The disciples in our Gospel reading this morning were not alone in their boat either. But they did need to be reminded of that! Even though they have followed Jesus all over the countryside, seeing him cast out demons and heal the sick, there they were in their boat, many of them accomplished fishermen, afraid in a storm.

You may not know this but the Sea of Galilee is really a freshwater lake. It is 700 feet below sea level with a maximum depth of 150 feet. Due to the height of the hills surrounding it, abrupt temperature shifts occur, causing sudden and violent storms. While the disciples may not have had any understanding of the physics of the landscape, they knew storms happened, and they had been in them before. And even though they had Jesus in the boat with them, they still, needed reminding.

I think, though, that we need to give the disciples a break here, because Jesus was asleep in the boat! How can anyone sleep in a boat in a storm? I assure you that no one was sleeping on that plane Friday night! But perhaps Jesus could sleep because he knew who was in control.... or maybe the God of all power, ruler of the universe, at whose command all things came to be, was just waiting for the disciples to notice who was in the boat with them. The disciples woke Jesus and asked if he even cared that they were perishing. It was then that Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Once again the disciples needed to be reminded of things. To have their fears calmed, to be reminded of their faith. They were filled with great awe as they said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Perhaps that is why we come here, week after week, to sit together in this upside down boat. We come to find strength and courage to go out and face the storms in our lives. We come to be held in the strong and wise arms of God as we wait in trust for the storms to pass. We come to be reminded, just as the first disciples needed reminding, that Jesus still casts out our demons, heals our infirmities, and calls us to follow him.

Maybe we come here only half believing that we will find Jesus, but that is enough faith, just enough. Because when we are here we experience the presence of the risen Christ among us, and hear the One who says, "Peace! Be still!" over our storm tossed lives. And while our boat has plenty of room for us to invite others in to experience the love of God, boats are meant to take us places. And there is a world outside this holy boat where others are being tossed about in more storms than we can list. Do we not care that others are perishing? We may need reminding from

time to time, but if we are in this boat with Jesus, and we are, then we care. We care and we respond with the love of God - the God who loves us so much that “he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”¹
Amen.

¹ John 3:16 NRSV