



# Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 20, 2021

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "It is Well with My Soul"

Joel Raney

## Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* Call to Worship

Liturgist: Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

**All: his love endures forever.**

Liturgist: Let the redeemed of the Lord, tell their story – those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

Liturgist: Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

**All: his love endures forever.**

*Psalm 107:1-3 adapted*

**All Singing: 534 "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly"**

God's Greeting

God's People Greeting One Another

**All Singing: 10 "We Sing the Mighty Power of God"**

*Children ages 4–7 may come forward for a blessing before they leave for "Children in Worship."*

Children's Blessing

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All: And also, with you.**

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: Some went out on the sea in ships; they saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep.

**All: For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves.**

Liturgist: They mounted up to heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards.

**All: And all their wisdom was swallowed up.**

*Silent Confession and Lament*

Soloist: "Wake Up, Jesus" Porters Gate

Jesus, when you gonna wake up?  
When you gonna wake up and calm this raging sea?

Jesus, when you gonna wake up? When you gonna wake up?  
How can you sleep when we're in need?

Just one word from the Maker and all the waves be still.  
Just one touch from the Healer and all will be made well.

So won't you rise up? Won't you rise up?

Liturgist: Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.

**All: He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. He guided them to their desired harbor.**

Liturgist: Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for human kind.

**All: Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.**  
*Psalm 107:23-32 adapted*

\* **All Singing: "Cornerstone"**

**My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' Name.**

*Christ alone, Cornerstone, weak made strong in the Savior's love  
Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.*

**When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil.  
My anchor holds within the veil.**

**When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found,  
Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless stand before the throne.**

## Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

**All Singing:** Prepare our hearts, O God, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that in, hearing, we may also obey your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

Sermon: God in the Boat

\* **All Singing:** 532 “Be Still, for the Presence”

The Institution  
The Thanksgiving  
The Invitation  
Communion

**All Singing:** 840 “Behold the Lamb”

The Acclamation

\* **All Singing:** 959 “Glory Be to the Father”

## Dedication

A Word of Blessing  
Prayers of the People

## Sending

\* **All Singing:** 943 “God Be with You Till We Meet Again”

Benediction

Postlude

### Worship Leaders

Pianist / Cellist / Soloist: Adeline Larsen

Pianist / Vocalist: Erin Pacheco

Vocalists: Helen Van Wyck

Dot Graham

Violinist: Frances Boerman-Cornell

Percussionist: Paul Mulchrone

Minister: Roger Nelson

Acolyte: Lillian Post

Liturgist: Mary Post

Prayer: Jim Achterhof

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)  
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5825 W 151st Street, Oak Forest, IL 60452  
www.hope-crc.org

Text: Mark 4: 35-41  
Title: God in the Boat  
Date: 06.20.21  
Roger Allen Nelson

Zach, our son, has been living in southern California for 5 years. I love going to see him and being close to the ocean. I'm intoxicated by the miles and miles of accessible beaches, the endlessly changing beauty of the water, and the power of the ocean.

And, I'm enamored with surfing. I'm not a surfer, and probably too old and brittle to try, but I love watching, wishing, and lately reading about surfing, surf culture, flow, and the lore of the ocean. For example, Paul Theroux in *Under the Wave in Waimea* writes:

*....as the wave rose the base of it fell away, forty feet or more of its gleaming curve, and as he scrambled to his feet to ride it, he slipped and fell forward, and the wave closed over him, an indifferent feature of the sea, vast and implacable, pressing him and overwhelming him and taking him down, burying him – not in fury, not a god or a giant but a dumb sudden stunning bigness that bulked above him and just as suddenly collapsed. Seconds of its colossal wash before another, heavier wave swept over him, past a shaft of sunlight, tumbling him into suffocating darkness, burying him again. Bubbles rattled in his ears, his leash tugged at his ankle, he fought the surge – the thick sweep of water – and was dragged down...*

You get the idea...

Makes me want to learn to surf, but for many it just sounds terrifying. The power, the "under-toad," the indifference, the unknown of the ocean can be overwhelming. There's a rightful elemental fear of a raging sea – even to our modern ears. The thick sweep of water is a terrifying reminder that we don't have control.

In our text this morning "the weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed, if not for the courage fearless crew the Minnow would be lost...." Different story, same dynamic....

The disciples, seasoned fishermen who lived on the water, are battling a "furious squall." The Greek has it as a *mega-wind*. (Yup, the same root word from which we get "mega...") It can also be translated as "violent."

The waves are crashing over the bow while Jesus is sound asleep in the stern. So, the disciples – maybe a little indignant – wake him; he's doing nothing to help. At the very least he could bail water. He could do something. The wind, the water, the waves all threaten to overwhelm the boat and drag them under. They don't have control.

Therefore, Jesus gets up, speaks to the storm, and it becomes *mega-calm*. (Yup, same word here.)

Dear friends, in this section of his gospel, Mark is stacking up parables and stories of healings, each building upon the next, in order to create a sort of crescendo about the nature of Jesus. And our text is a miracle over nature.

It is one thing to heal the sick, but to rebuke the winds like a naughty child and address the waters as if shutting-down an unruly heckler, to demand obedience of creation, is something fit only for God.

So, the simple direct route to this passage's lesson is that Jesus is Lord of creation – symbolized by his power over wind and wave.

Therefore, whatever stormy sea you cross, be not afraid.

Jesus is not just teacher and friend, he is Lord.

As you call on him, he will see you through the furious squall.

Thanks be to God.

That's the simple direct route to this text. In fact, earlier this week, a pastor asked me about preaching on this passage, "Are you going say it's a metaphor for all the ways that the church is buffeted by the stormy winds of same-sex marriage and political division?"

Ummm....

No, not so much....

Because the whole text turns on the next line....

After Jesus calms the storm, he turns to the disciples and asks,

*Why are you so afraid?*

He doesn't ask, "Why were you afraid?"

He doesn't reference the storm or rebuke the disciples for their fear.

He doesn't challenge them to tame a tsunami "in the name of Jesus!"

He asks, "Why are you afraid?"

As the Greek has it, they knew fear upon great fear. They were scared witless. They didn't have a frame of reference for what just happened. They couldn't cope or cover. This was beyond what they could grasp and bigger than they could swallow. They weren't afraid of the storm; they were terrified by who was with them in the boat....

Again, it's one thing to follow a charismatic teacher,

it's another thing to believe in a mystical-miracle-worker,

but it is something totally different to realize that God is in the boat with you.

The Broadway show, *An Act of God*, featured Jim Parsons, from the *The Big Bang Theory*, as God. The show was irreverent, poked a good deal of fun at the Old Testament, and while sort of cheap and sophomoric it trotted out all the predictable problems with God and faith. But, at least when I saw it, something remarkable happened.

As presented in this play, it was Jesus' idea to come to earth. To which God says, "Jesus, they're going to kill you." But then when Jim Parsons (as God) started talking about what it meant for Jesus to be human that theater got as quiet as a church. He said,

*I watched them stick a crown of thorns on his head and he didn't say a word. I watched them hit him and spit on him and crucify him and he could have called to me for help and I would have sent an army of angels to him but he didn't say a word and I said, 'that's my boy.'*"

And then he added,

*You people need to know Jesus died for your sins.*

And in a Broadway comedy, God was in the boat with us. No one was laughing. It was hauntingly silent. Mega-calm. Almost holy.

Dear friends, it's easy to have God as a benign-benevolent-over-seer (a kindly-love-force) safely removed in heaven, from whence he pulls levers and flips switches. A God pleased with our devotion, wanting to bless us if we have faith enough faith and fix our problems with enough prayer. It is comforting to have a remote God working out a grand plan – a plan that we may not always understand, but that will work out for our good. It is easy to read this text as a metaphor for God's care in the storms of life, but it is terrifying to have God in the boat with us.

That God was somehow incarnate even unto death, would rightly inspire the sense of awe from which we get "awful." That God is not just transcendent, but visited earth, would rightly inspire a fear upon great fear.

You may be familiar with this line; Annie Dillard puts it this way:

*It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense, or the waking God may return and draw us out to where we can never return.*

Dear friends, even the disciples – who saw Jesus every day, who listened to him teach, and who saw the healings – are befuddled by the identity of Jesus. They ask,

*Who is this?*

So, while Mark might be constructing a Christology, making a case for the nature of Jesus – this week its power over creation, next week its raising a young girl from the dead, power over death.... While Mark is developing that theology, there is still the humanity of the disciples, trying to make sense of Jesus.

And, in that I find great comfort and encouragement.  
Maybe you do the same.

A good deal of the Christian faith is a social/cultural construct. We develop ways of being, talking, and living together. It's a wonderful gift. It's a way of life with forgiveness, mercy, and love for the other, as essential building blocks. (Thanks be to God.) But at the heart of it there is still the mystery of the incarnation.

Who is Jesus?

What is his nature?

What does it mean that God visited earth in Jesus?

How is God in the boat with us?

Those questions don't diminish the confidence that nothing in this world or the next will separate us from the love of God, nor minimize the storms we face, nor lose sight of the God of wind and wave. But...

But, with the disciples we live in the mystery of God coming to us in Jesus of Nazareth. And that mystery extends to how God is with us today in scripture, sacrament, and our life together.

And, therefore, with the disciples let us acknowledge that we know a measure of fear – something more than chummy familiarity. With the disciples let us make space for that which we can't tame or neuter, let us hold in faith that God is in the boat with us. Even here, even now, celebrated in bread and wine.

God is here.  
Don't be afraid.

Amen.