

**18 Pentecost  
October 4, 2020**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

The readings this morning include the story of the Ten Commandments, Paul's letter written while he was in prison to his fellow Christians in Philippi, and another story about a vineyard owner ... in this story one the tenants kill the vineyard owners son.

And then we are living in a world in chaos ... especially after the news that our president ... the leader of the world's most powerful country ... has been diagnosed with the potentially deadly COVID-19 coronavirus.

The Ten Commandments ... the founding core values of our Judeo-Christian faith. What could be more important. We all know the Ten Commandments, yet few of us could actually name all ten. Several years out of seminary I preached a sermon on the Ten Commandments ... and I left one out. It was hard to live that one down.

Then there is this story about the vineyard owner ... another vineyard owner story. Or, maybe all the stories about the vineyard owner are about the same vineyard owner. Although the author of Matthew's gospel says that this story is a parable, it really isn't. It follows on the heels of the story we heard last week about the vineyard owner and his two sons. That story was a "gotcha" story meant to hold the chief priests and elders accountable for using their positions in the Temple to exploit the people. The vineyard owner in this story ... and last week's story ... are clearly allegorical references to God.

This week's Gospel reading is Jesus once more speaking truth to power ... the power of the chief priest and elders of the Temple. The text even says that the chief priest and elders get the point of the story:

*"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet."*

It was just five days later that they did arrest Jesus, and he was crucified for speaking truth to power.

However, I'm not going to speak about the Ten Commandments, or Paul's letter to the Philippians, or the vineyard owner this morning. Instead I'm going to say something about a chapter from the book ***Finding Jesus, Discovering Self***. This is the book that we are presently using in our Thursday Book Study. It is written by some people I know very well ... one

Christian, and one Jewish. Bill Dols, is an Episcopal Priest, a friend, and a mentor; and Bill's co-author is Caren Goldman ... my wife, and the love of my life.

Each chapter of this book is centered around a passage from one of the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Using a neo-Socratic method of asking question, each passage is unpacked to see the myriad of meanings it may have in the time of Jesus, in our world today, and in our own personal psyche.

So, the chapter the Book Study discussed this past week was called the "Weathering Storms." The passage was from Mark's gospel and is the story of Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee with his disciples at night, and a big storm arises. The boat is getting swamped, the disciples are afraid, but Jesus is asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. In the words of the author of Mark's gospel,

*"[Jesus] 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 [the disciples], 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'"*

So why this story instead of the Ten Commandments, or Paul, or the vineyard owner. Simply because we're in the midst of a storm ... a mega-storm ... and lots of people are telling me that they are feeling like their boat is getting swamped.

So far, the 21st century has been a century of menace and insecurity. In the past twenty years the threats have come in rapid succession ... terrorism, beginning with 9/11 .... financial collapse with the recession of 2008 ... climate change with rising sea levels, more and larger storms, wildfires, and animal extinction.

And now, in just this year of 2020, we are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, the huge consequences of an economic shutdown, the heightened awareness of systemic racism, and the quaking of our democracy around a presidential election. Then we learned on Friday that our President is ill with this dreaded novel coronavirus. Whether one agrees with our President or not, we pray for his speedy recovery ... for his sake, and for the sake of this nation. For good reasons, a tone of heightened anxiety and fear has become the default setting in the world in which we live. There is a storm raging in our midst ... and it is indeed frightening.

Of course, this doesn't include the other stressors in our lives, many compounded by the side effects of this pandemic. Physical illnesses, relationship problems, mental health issues, personal finances ... and the list goes on. No wonder we feel like our boat is swamped and we can't bail fast enough. No wonder we are frightened by the raging storm outside ... and inside our psyche.

At least the disciples had Jesus. All they had to do was awaken the miracle worker and he calmed the storm. But where is Jesus today? If he is sleeping on a cushion in the back of the

boat, how do we awaken him? Sometimes, that feeling like we have been abandoned by Jesus ... by God ... only makes the situation all the more desperate.

There are all kinds of ways to understand this story. Maybe it literally happened and Jesus performed a miracle and calmed the storm. I'm not saying he didn't, however I'd like to offer another way to look at the raging tempest, the frightened disciples, and the role of Jesus.

I begin with the question Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The question implies that if we had the "faith" Jesus is talking about, we wouldn't be frightened. So, what is that "faith?" Is it adherence to a creed? Is it belief that Jesus is that miracle worker that will always protect them? Or, is it something else?

Imagine if you will, that the boat you are in is your psyche ... that part of you that is your soul and body and feelings and spirit all wrapped up together. When life becomes a storm ... even a mega-storm like we are in now ... there are parts of us that become anxious, alarmed, scared ... even terrified ... just like the disciples in the boat. But also remember that you are made in the image of God ... in the image of the divine. God is alive in you just as God was alive in Jesus. If that divine part of you is awakened in the midst of the storm, you can be the source of your own miracle ... you can access that divine presence that will bring peace.

"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" What do we have to do to have that faith? What do we have to do to awaken that divine presence in each of us that can be the source of calm in the midst of chaos?

The divine is alive in every cell of our being, and when we see ourselves as spiritual beings in a physical bodies ... rather than a physical body with a spiritual element ... we are acknowledging that we are blessed children of a loving God ... and made in God's image. However, we must also listen to what the divine is saying, and often that means silencing other voices, such as anxiety and fear ... the voice of the terrified disciples shouting within.

How do we do that, especially in the storms of our lives today? I am sure that there are many different ways that work for others, but two that work for me are prayer, and sharing in a faith community.

According to the Episcopal Church's Catechism, prayer is, "responding to God, by thought and by deed, with and without words." What does NOT work for me is saying prayers, and expecting God to answer me through my intellect. What DOES work for me is sitting in silence and listening. The divine presence of God that is alive in every cell of my body knows full well what I need ... much more so than my self-centered mind can articulate in any human language.

I have an advantage over most of you ... I live within walking distance of the church. So every morning I walk to the church to open it for meditation and prayers, and it is like a pilgrimage.

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr one described pilgrimage as motion “passing through territories not our own, seeking something we might call contemplation, or perhaps the word clarity will do as well. A goal to which only the spirit’s compass points the way.”

I have found that seeing this short journey as path of spiritual pilgrimage has become a source of strength and hope for me. It is a regular reminder ... there is a certain rhythm. Yet, there is a diversity as I walk different routes, and they are a reminder that we all find and venture forth on our own pilgrimages as we wrestle with who we are, what we believe, and what we are willing to change our lives, our relationships and our actions.

I am the Vicar of St. Cyprian’s. I am your priest and pastor. However, those are just roles I happen to have in this community of faith. By participating and sharing in this community of faith I gain as much from each of you as you may gain from me. We support each other. We share in a common meal with each other .... even in these times when we are physically separated. We carry each others’ burdens, and we share in each others’ joys. We see in each other the divine presence of God alive, and we affirm that each and every one of us is a beloved child of God made in God’s image.

*“[Jesus] 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 [the disciples], ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’”*

Like the disciples in that boat there are times that parts of our psyche become anxious and frightened. It feels like we will be overwhelmed by the storm that is already swamping the boat. Yet there is a divine presence also in the psyche ... sometimes unconscious like Jesus sleeping on the cushion in the back of the boat ... sometimes that unconscious part of our psyche needs to be awakened. Once it is present, it stills the storm around us ... it brings peace to the winds and the waves.

Yes, 2020 has been a year of storms, and they seem to keep coming and getting more intense. But there is a source in each of us to bring peace to the wind and the waves. God gave us that source when we were made. There is a divine presence of God alive in every cell of our bodies. Awakening that power can give us the comfort we seek. What does it cost? Being prayerful and listening. Sharing one another’s burdens and joys. Seeking the divine presence of God in each and every other person we meet.

Richard Rohr shared a prayer this week written by Ety Hillesum who was murdered in the Holocaust at the age of 29 in the Westernbork transit camp. She was a young woman who suffered much more injustice in the concentration camp than any of us can imagine. This is her prayer:

*There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too... And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves.*

This sermon wasn't about the Ten Commandments, or the vineyard owner. And there may be lots of other ways to understand the story of Jesus calming the storm. But this is one way to understand the story that works for me. I hope it does for you as well.

Amen.