

5 Pentecost
June 24, 2018

**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.**

During this summer and into the fall we will be hearing the saga of David from the Hebrew Scriptures. David ... the boy shepherd who became King of Israel.

You may have noticed, but there are two stories about David this morning ... the story of David and Goliath; and the story of David and Jonathon. I asked Weyman to read both of them ... I know it was a little long, but I figured that if we didn't read both of them, you would be reading the one that Weyman didn't read during the sermon, so I might as well get it out of the way.

These stories about David in our Hebrew Scriptures are wonderful. They have become archetypal. How many books have you read, or films have you seen where the plot is that of an ordinary citizen taking on big government or a giant corporation and winning the battle. A "David & Goliath story." And then, after slaying Goliath, David becomes a military commander. In his successes he meets with widespread acclaim and love, but also with growing hostility from his nemesis, King Saul.

The second story about David offers another look at the evolving saga. The actions of Jonathan, Saul's son, express his deep love and allegiance to David. The gifts Jonathan gives to David suggest he relinquishes his right to succeed his father as king, and the love he expresses also implies a political commitment. Listen to the words from 1 Samuel:

...the soul of Jonathon was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathon loved him as his own soul.

Jonathan's devotion to David entails a significant and risky cost. Saul's story becomes increasingly tragic as he clearly cannot derail what God intends for David, and his anger and envy drives him toward derangement. The evil spirit that intermittently influences Saul appears to be partly the result of his own behavior. We will hear more about this brewing storm involving David, Jonathon and Saul in the weeks ahead.

Having said all that, this morning I would like to focus on another storm ... the one we just heard about in Mark's gospel. Jesus, who has been healing and teaching on the western side of the Sea of Galilee suggest, at the end of the day, that he and his disciples go to the other side of the lake. Obviously tired, Jesus went to the stern of the boat and fell asleep on a cushion, and then a great windstorm arose. The disciples wake him and confront his appearance of apathy. "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus' response is to rebuke the wind and say to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" and the wind stopped and the sea was dead calm.

Jesus then looked at the disciples and asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Obviously, for the author of Mark's gospel, the opposite of faith was not unbelief but rather fear. Our fear demonstrates that we do not really trust God's existence, God's power, or God's good intentions toward us. The disciples, as so often in Mark's Gospel, don't get the point. Instead of asking about their own fear and what it tells them about their faith, they ask about Jesus: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Some people look at this story, and other stories like this in the gospels, as proof of Jesus' super-natural divinity. Only a divine being could command the natural universe and have it obey. Others dismiss the story altogether because they don't believe that anyone, including Jesus, could just command a storm to stop raging. Did this actually happen? I don't know, and in some sense I don't care. To argue about its validity, I believe, is to miss the point, and is therefore a waste of time. You have heard me say this so many times it may bore you, "But just because it didn't happen doesn't mean it isn't true."

Who of us has not been caught up in a storm in recent years? Two hurricanes in two years certainly qualifies as stormy. If you weren't personally effected I'm sure you know someone who was. And, it was not just the damage from the storm that was so devastating ... there were the insurance companies and the contractors and the disruption to people's lives.

However, there are other kinds of storms as well. All we have to do is look around us. People you and I know and love are facing life changing, if not life threatening, illnesses. We all know relationships and families that are breaking apart. Even as the economy is strengthening, there are those who are being left behind and ignored.

And what about the storms in the greater world: the immigration crisis at our southern border ... and the innocent children caught in the political turmoil; the hiring of armed security guards at our schools to ward off a shooter with a high powered firearm rather than outlaw the firearms themselves; the uncertainty about a new relationship with North Korea a nuclear threat; and impact of refugees from Africa and Syria upon the European nations. And the list goes on ...

The disciples asked Jesus, "Do you not care that we might perish?" It is the question that we ask our God in storms like this. And all we want is for the storm to subside ... for the wind to stop ... for the waves to cease ... for the sea to calm.

Yes, we are afraid ... and we have reason to be afraid. What is this faith we are supposed to have? For me it isn't about believing in a God that will rend miracles, because all too often when I have asked for a miracle it hasn't happened. When I need a miracle and God does not make it happen, then I come to the conclusion that either God is capricious, or I am unworthy, or I'm just not asking the right way. I can't believe that the God who made me in the image of

God, and calls be a blessed child of God, would be capricious with me ... or deem me unworthy ... or have me make my requests in only one correct fashion.

When I am in those storms ... and they have happened in the past, and they still happen to me ... when I am in those storms I have to confess that I am afraid. I have to remind myself to take a deep breath, to reach within my soul for courage, and to face the storm with a confidence that God is in the storm with me ... beside me ... like Jesus was beside his disciples.

As someone once said, "Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain."

I'd like to end with a story about storms. It is from **Across the Threshold, Into the Questions** ... a book Caren and I wrote. This is just a portion of a story from Caren ... it is about her experience with breast cancer.

During the days before my surgery to clean up the site of the tumor removed for biopsy and make sure the cancer had not spread, my quest to discover who would save me from my fears and counter my doubts stretched from my husband children, and doctors to friends, relatives, and members of my spiritual communities. Each one did the best that he or she could to listen, be compassionate, and pray for and with me. Yet despite their efforts and mine, nothing miraculously caused my Tsunami sized waves of emotional distress or the cancer to go away. And all my right answers, suggestions, and advice to others who had ever been in my rocky sinking boat felt like big lies.

The winds of change did come – later, much, much later. Not with every one of my doctors' forecast of sunny days ahead. Not with the first, second, third, or even fourth annual report that the days of turbulence and devastation were history and I was cancer free. Not with the statistics that said my cure rate was as good as it gets with breast cancer. No, the change came in its own unpredictable way, just like the blessed calm after a major storm. It came gradually. It came as one ray of sun after another began to peek through lingering black clouds. It came as those little setting-sun pale rainbows called Sun Dogs that frame dark skies. And at last it became the realization that when I found the lump, reported it, and decided not to let my doubts render me powerless, I could at last take a leap of faith that would carry me to the other side of my darkest hours and worst fears. A leap of faith that still feels like a miracle.

[Across the Threshold, Into the Questions, page 23]

The disciples asked Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" and in response he stilled the storm. But he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

In the storms in our lives we will be afraid. But we are also reminded that God is with us in those storms, and those storms will subside. Our faith is not simply an intellectual belief ... an affirmation of one creed or another. Our faith is about confidence that we are beloved children of God.

Remember, "Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain."

Amen.