

**4 Pentecost  
June 20, 2021**

**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.**

As I mentioned in last week's sermon, 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.

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. They are referred to as "David & Goliath" stories.

But the story does not end with Goliath facedown, dead on the ground. 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. Let me read the next part of the story:

*<sup>57</sup>On David's return from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with the head of the Philistine in his hand. <sup>58</sup>Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."*

*<sup>18:1</sup>When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. <sup>2</sup>Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup>Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. <sup>4</sup>Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. <sup>5</sup>David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.*

*<sup>10</sup>The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; <sup>11</sup>and Saul threw the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.*

*<sup>12</sup>Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. <sup>13</sup>So Saul removed him from his presence, and made him a commander of a thousand; and David marched out and came in, leading the army. <sup>14</sup>David had success in all his undertakings; for the LORD was with him. <sup>15</sup>When Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in awe of him. <sup>16</sup>But all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them.*

The second part of the 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. Hear the words from the First Book of Samuel again:

*...the soul of Jonathon was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathon loved him as his own soul ...<sup>3</sup>Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.*

This is an interesting reading from Holy Scripture during Gay Pride Month.

However, 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?"

Let me offer a thought about the context of how First Century Jews might have heard this story. They certainly would have been knowledgeable of the Book of Jonah ... as in Jonah and the Whale. But, do you remember how Jonah ended up in the belly of the whale?

As the story goes, God called Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh and preach to them about their evil ways. But Jonah was afraid of what would happen to him in this notorious city, so he ran away. Nineveh was to the east, so Jonah headed to Tarshish which was at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea. He got on a boat at Joppa, but soon a storm arose. Jonah was asleep in the hold, and all the crew members on deck were scrambling to survive. They figured that someone had angered the gods, and therefore this terrible tempest. Aha ... it must be that slacker asleep below deck. So, they grab Jonah and throw him over the side. That is how Jonah ended up being swallowed by a whale.

So, when First Century Jews would hear the story about the disciples in a boat, with Jesus asleep in the stern, and a storm comes up, they would be reminded of Jonah. But certainly Jesus was no Jonah, so who of the disciples was the guilty one? The anxiety amongst the disciples as they finger-pointed at each other is also part of the story ... not just the storm

rocking the boat. And, I imagine that few of those hearing this story would take it as literal ... certainly, they did not take the story of Jonah and the Whale literally.

Remember, Jesus 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. For them, only a divine being could command the natural universe and have it obey. However, 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 ... but for me, that is not the point. To argue about its validity, I believe, is to miss the focus, and is therefore a waste of time. You have heard me say this so many times it may bore you, "Just because it didn't happen, doesn't mean it isn't true."

There are lots of ways this story has been interpreted. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung was no biblical scholar, and I don't think he ever wrote about this story. However, there are a number of people who followed in his footsteps who did. For Jung ... metaphorically ... the surface of a body of water represented the boundary between the conscious and unconscious. That this boundary was disrupted by wind and waves is important. And the boat represents the Self ... Self with an uppercase "S." The disciples represent parts of the self that have been hijacked by the anxiety of this disruption, while Jesus represents the non-anxious presence of an emotional and spiritually mature presence. For some followers of Jung, this is about how each of us can access that emotional and spiritually mature presence in us to calm the storms we encounter in life.

Who of us has not been caught up in a storm in recent years? Literal storms like Matthew and Irma. Figurative storms like a pandemic and all its consequences. The cultural storms around systemic racism following the killing of George Floyd and so many other Black men and women. Fearful storms of gunman with high capacity firearms shooting people at random. And the political storm of last year's presidential election ... a tempest that spawned a storming of the US Capital.

For many people like you and me these storms around us have been life-changing ... literally recovering from flooding and destruction ... rearranging life while isolated and creating a new normal as we begin to see the clouds lift ... repairing families buffeted by political issues while trying to find a place of peace in the midst of tension.

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-threatening illnesses. We all know relationships and families that are breaking apart. And, even as the economy is strengthening, there are those who are being left behind and ignored.

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. However, 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 ... the God in whose image we are made.

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

Amen.