

Jesus Takes Us with Him into the Storm

I. The Storms of Our Lives

- A. A back issue of the Christian Century magazine carries a one frame cartoon entitled, *Noah, 2015*.
1. Noah is drowning in a cataclysmic storm of hurricane, lightning, and a deluge of rain.
 - a. The dark clouds are labeled, “*climate change*.”
 - b. Noah is not in the ark but flailing in the water, barely afloat.
 - (1. He exclaims, “*Sure I was warned, -- but the remedy sounded difficult*.”----
 - c. At the bottom of the image a small line says, “*He has gathered two of Every Excuse*.”----
- B. Three years ago this week Pope Francis released an Encyclical entitled, “On Care for Our Common Home.”
1. All 82 pages give an impassioned summary of the efforts of scientists, theologians and many other authorities to raise a warning to the world, --
 - a. and especially for Christians and other people of faith to recognize the need for a moral response. ---
 - b. That was the beginning of our mission group here at St. Benedict's which we have called, *Earth Care*. ---
 2. But as it was for Noah, the remedy sounds difficult.
- C. The gospel reading today invites us to ask, “*How can we find our way through the storms of our lives?*” It is a story of fear and of faith.
1. Fear is the visceral response of Jesus' terrified disciples in a frail, storm-tossed boat.
 - a. The picture resonates both with our individual lives and with our corporate lives -- in congregations and communities.
 2. We are afraid of the ‘wind and waves’ that assail our fragile vessels,

- a. our lives,\ our churches,\ our cities,\ and nations.
- b. We fear disapproval,\ rejection,\ failure,\ meaninglessness,\ illness \ and we fear death –
 - (1. our own death,\ the death of those we love,\ and the potential demise of the communities we cherish.
- 2. The sea,\ the storm,\ and the fragile craft that carries our Lord and his followers across the Sea of Galilee --
 - a. all offer evocative,\ metaphorical images of our life journeys
 - (1. the perils of some passages,\
 - (2. the vulnerability of the craft that bears us on our way,\
 - (3. and our longing for One who calms both us and the storm.
- 4. What is the kind of faith that can face such storms?

II. Jesus takes us with him into the storm.

- A. Jesus' whole ministry has been described as one dangerous crossing after another.
 - 1. Starting with his baptism,- the moment the waters close over his head, - God's rushing Spirit meets and merges with his.
 - 2. His path through the world becomes one of confrontation:
 - a. confrontation between entrenched interests and the in-breaking kingdom;
 - b. The unclean spirits don't want their boat rocked.
 - (1. Neither do the political and religious authorities.
 - c. But the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus.
 - (1. In his own words, he comes to "*bind the strong man,*" and Mark shows him doing that,\ one example after another.
- B. In this story Jesus says, "*Let's go across to the other side.*"--
 - 1. For the gospel writer this is about more than a change in venue.
 - 2. The other side represents Gentile-pagan territory;
 - a. it's the Decapolis; the center of Hellenistic influence on Jewish soil.
 - 3. It's as if Jesus turns to his followers and says,
 - a. "*I'm beat. Let's go touch base with the Roman occupation,*"
 - b. and they set sail straight into a waiting storm.

4. Maybe this tells us why the disciples--who are fishermen and experienced with storms, --
 - a. why they are so hopelessly out of their element in this storm.
 - b. It's as if the boundary crossing has unleashed the forces of chaos. -----
 - (1. Why do people stay in their own neighborhoods?
 - (2. Why do we enforce borders,
 - (3. build fences, and equip armies?
 - c. We are trying to keep the chaos monsters from breaking free and battering us to pieces.
 - (1. We try to be in control of the forces of chaos just below the surface of our vulnerable lives.
 - (2. Most of us don't feel equipped to deal with monsters, internal or external.
 - (3. The mere thought of them is enough to make us take off like Jonah in the other direction. /
 - d. But here, Jesus gets into the boat, "*just as he is*" - no weapons,\ no gear,\ nothing up his sleeve, and sets a course for confrontation...and falls asleep.
 5. When the storm breaks in all its fury the disciples rouse him in panic. ---
 - a. "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*"
 - b. It is a cry we are familiar with,- one of fear and a sense of betrayal in the face of what seems to be the silence of God.
 - (1. The natural disasters of hurricanes,\ tsunamis,\ earth quakes and floods,
 - (2. the tragedies of terrorist attacks,\ war and \inexplicable acts of violence,
 - (3. the pain of various kinds of personal suffering,---
 - (4. all leave us crying out to God, "*Do you not care that we are perishing?*"-----
- C. Jesus sits up,-- this tired, vulnerable man and speaks directly to the wind and the waves, - "*Peace,*"- he says, - "*Be still.*"
1. He talks to the storm face to face, just as he'll talk to the legion of demons waiting for him at Gerasa.
 3. It is Jesus' absolute faith in God's presence with him that is the ground of his complete obedience to God,\ and the source of his divine authority.

- a. We see this in stark contrast to the fear of the disciples.
- b. He asks the disciples the telling question of this story,
 - (1. *“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”*)
- 3. It’s important to note that Jesus never says, *“There is nothing to be afraid of.”*
 - a. The Galilean storm was fearsome indeed, --
 - (1. as are the ‘wind and waves’ that threaten us.
 - b. Rather he asks, *“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”*
 - c. The hard truth is that fearsome things are very real:
 - (1. The world is engulfed with these realities,\ often, but not always, of our own making.
 - d. As we grow in faith, it’s not a denial that such things are real,\ but we begin to recognize they are not the final reality.
 - (1. They need not have dominion over us;\ they need not own us;\ they need not paralyze us\ there is something deeper
 - (2. Faith is the trust that reigning over this world of fearsome things is God who is present, now.
 - (3. Faith, then has the quality of a radical freedom.
- 4. In the midst of chaos and trouble, we are instructed: *“Do not be afraid!”*
 - a. It is the first and the last word of the gospel.
 - b. It is the word the angels spoke to the terrified shepherds,
 - c. and the word spoken at the tomb when the women discover it is empty,
 - (1. *“Do not be afraid!”*)
 - (2. Because God is with us.

III. The lesson is succinct; it is the presence of our Lord that brings faith,\ the centering we must have for action that makes a difference.

- A. This is not an easy posture to adopt, especially in today’s world.
 - 1. Life, for the most part, is a frantic effort to keep pace,\ to meet obligations,\ and to reach objectives.
 - 2. We are geared to the philosophy that when things go wrong, it is within our capabilities to handle any problem that comes our way.
 - 3. But this is part of the foolishness that besets us as human beings.
 - a. We are not, as we claim, masters of our fate.

- b. There are things and events that we cannot control. ---
- 4. As long as our lives are still,\ and the surface of events over which we move is smooth,\ we are seemingly sufficient to cope.
 - a. *“Our muscles can row,\ our eyes can guide,\ our heads can plan.”*
- B. But out on the lake a shout goes up, *“we are sinking!”*
 - 1. It is a cry that wells up from human lives,\ from human relationships,\ from human institutions,\ from human civilizations, --
 - a. especially when it seems that everything has been tried and nothing has worked. ---
 - 2. For some there is contempt for the cry that they feel is sounded against an empty universe. ---
 - 3. Others realize that the cry can signal a moment of change,\ of turning,\ of recovery,\ of new creation.
- C. In that moment the Lord’s voice sounds and resonates deep within and awakens our very soul, *“Peace! Be still!”*
 - 1. Jesus speaks with God’s authority and faith is born.
 - a. Faith emerges from the chaos of our fearful hearts.
 - b. The center of our existence has been shifted.
 - 2. Our response is an inner awakening, to *worship*, for we know that we have encountered the one who has called us into being.
 - 3. The desire of our lives then becomes,\ how to make our new found relationship the center of our living.
- D. To close I would like to share with you a quotation from a sermon by the early 5th Century church theologian, Augustine of Hippo. It is entitled: *“Awakening the Christ Asleep In You”* –
 - 1. When you have to listen to abuse,\ that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is roused,\ you are being tossed by the waves.
 - 2. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high,\ the boat is in danger,\ your heart is imperiled,\ your heart is taking a battering.
 - 3. On hearing yourself insulted,\ you long to retaliate;
 - a. but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune - shipwreck.
 - 4. Why is this? -- Because Christ is asleep in you.
 - a. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten his presence.
 - b. Rouse him, then; remember him,\ let him keep watch within you,\ pay heed to him...

5. A temptation arises: -- it is the wind.
 - a. It disturbs you: -- it is the surging of the sea.
 - b. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let him remind you of those words:
 - (1. *"Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey him."*

(Augustine, Sermons 63.1-3)



