

## Storm

### Luke 8:22-25

One summer Jill and I and a friend chartered a small sailing boat to explore part of Alaska. It was very small – there were two berths both big enough for two very close friends. We had one, our friend the other. The crew somehow slept on the table in the cabin. It was a good week and on the last day we were headed back to Juneau for a night in a real bed before flying out the next day. But there was a small craft advisory and sure enough, as we approached Juneau a storm hit. I soon discovered that my waterproof pants were not. This was no time for sailing, so we were using the engine to approach the harbor as the waves grew bigger and bigger. I was terrified, wet and cold. I held on tight and kept my eyes on the shore. I watched one particular white house as we passed it heading into the harbor, then passed it again, going in the other direction, then in the right direction again, back and forth. Even full throttle we could make no headway against the wind and the waves.

So I'm with the disciples. If *anyone* had been asleep in that boat I would have been yelling at them, "Wake up, Wake up, we're drowning!" Though how anyone could sleep during such a storm I can't imagine. Of course, in comparison with a hurricane, this was a minor storm event and we were probably never in any real danger. But it sure felt like it.

For most of us, there are many times in our lives when we feel like disaster is all around us and God is asleep on the job.

Jesus' ability to calm the sea shows that he must be God since it is clear from Job and the psalms, that only God has power over wind and water. The disciples must have been both relieved that they weren't about to die in the storm and terrified to realize that they were in the presence of

God. There, in the middle of the lake, in the stillness of the calm, they realized they were with God herself.

For most of us, like the disciples, when the storm is raging God feels furthest away. We are able to praise and thank God in times of stillness, calm and prosperity but when the difficult times hit, it is easy to think that somehow we must have done something wrong and that God is punishing us. And we can use this gospel reading to beat ourselves up even more. If God really loved me he or she would calm everything down as soon as I called, just like Jesus did.

Perhaps it is helpful to remember that Jonah is not the only Biblical hero to get in a ship wreck. The apostle Paul was a prisoner bound for Rome when the boat he was on got caught up in a storm and for two whole weeks the ship was basically out of control until it finally hit rocks off the coast of Malta and was wrecked. At no time did Paul think that God was punishing him or failing to love him. He told the crew, "I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.' (Acts 27: 22-26)

Storms and shipwrecks happen. Everything that we have taken for granted, everything and everyone that we hold dear can be taken away from us suddenly and unexpectedly. But God's love holds. "We will have to run aground on some island."

There's an old hymn which asks, "Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?" and the refrain

assures us “We have an anchor... grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love!”

It is the love of the Savior which holds us fast. God’s love continues throughout the disasters of our lives. God’s love is with all those in the Bermudas still searching for loved ones and trying to find food, water and shelter after the cataclysm which was Dorian. God’s love comes in practical ways through the gifts and help of others, but God’s love also sustains and calms us from within.

You will remember that last week I talked about the awakened heart, the broken heart and the radiant heart. It is the awakened heart which is able to connect to God’s love and keep us grounded there even during the times when our hearts are broken. As a result, the radiant heart allows us to give and to sacrifice for the sake of the common good.

But in times of broken heartedness, it is the awakened heart which keeps us grounded, firm and deep in the Savior’s love. I imagine that some of you, like me, find it difficult to keep connected with God’s love.

Unconditional love has not been part of our lives up until connecting with the divine. Our experiences in our families, among the human muddledness in which we were raised, did not always teach us to open our hearts joyfully confident that we will be met by love.

We find that we need to ask for healing. Healing of our hearts so that we can experience and trust in God’s love. We find that we need to practice noticing what is lovely and beautiful and kind around us rather than the things which annoy or irritate us. The time is now to ask for healing, not when the storm clouds gather. We get to awaken our hearts, to kindle gratitude and love for the One who loved us so much that he gave his only begotten Son that all who believe in him should not perish.

“Master, master” the disciples yelled, “We are perishing.”

No we are not. We are not perishing. The seas are rising, the storms are getting worse but we are not perishing. God is with us and will see us through, even through the portals of death. And so we need not be afraid. Paul told the ship's crew, "I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you." There will be no loss of life among us because we are enrolled in the reign of God which continues into eternity.

We are resting in the everlasting arms.