

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (B) 20 June 2021

Job 38:1-11 / Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32 / 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 / Mark 4:35-41

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Good morning. Happy Father's Day to all children and fathers - which pretty much covers all of us! We've been hearing about powerful stuff, like the love of fathers and children, in our readings today: about God, and miracles, and chaos. Which all come together in our gospel reading about Jesus and the disciples on a boat during a terrible storm.

So, do you think the disciples were more frightened before the storm was calmed, or after?

I'm guessing a number of people here have been out on boats and have experience with storms, calm and rough waters, with how quickly things can change. This morning's readings bring us a real sense of change in life: how things may not be as they seem on the outside, that there are deep forces at work in the world, that we all face challenges and chaos and change.

These readings take the presence and power of chaos in our lives seriously! And at the same time, they teach us that God isn't absent in the chaos, but is fully present. Job hears

God's voice coming out of a whirlwind, reaching out and showing that God creates *and* controls the chaos. In the psalm, we hear how the Lord both raises and calms the seas and the winds, bringing the people safely home again.

Chaos is scary - it can make us wonder whether God is with us or not. Maybe not all of us have experienced a bad storm on the water, but perhaps we've lived through a drought or flood, a blizzard, a tornado or hurricane. Or, we may have known the chaos of racial division, political volatility, economic and food insecurity, domestic violence, or addiction.

All these threaten our capacity to love and care for each other and the world. Chaos can try to pull us away from the hope of God, to drown out the promises God makes to never let us go, no matter what, to always be with us.

Saint Paul's dealing with the political reality of life under the Romans when he reminds the Corinthians to lean into Jesus' presence, that Jesus' caring calls them into an open-hearted faith that recognizes life's difficulties. Living the gospel isn't solitary work; it takes solidarity to stand up against a culture that doesn't respect the values of God's justice, and to endure its punishment. And to recognize that it's hidden faith, not outward appearance, that brings us abundant life.

But back to our disciples, out in a boat on what started as calm water. It turns into the boat ride from hell as a windstorm arises and the boat is swamped. We see the disciples' fear as they wake Jesus, asking, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" We're dying here, Jesus! It makes sense; we tend to fear things that are unknown, or challenging, or threatening.

But after Jesus brings the waters to a dead calm with the words "Peace! Be still!" that miracle seems to leave the disciples just as afraid as before. From terror of dying, now they're in a kind of holy awe - "Who *is* this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They're experiencing the fear of being in the presence of the living God.

In Saint Mark's Gospel the disciples don't recognize who Jesus is, despite all the teachings and healing and miracles, until the crucifixion, after the centurion speaks the truth, that this man was the Son of God.

In ancient times weather was considered a sort of divine control over nature. By Jesus' time, it was understood the creator of the universe controlled nature. Within the last few centuries geology and meteorology demystified weather, and nowadays we all have Doppler radar on our phones in our pockets.

The miracle Jesus performs in our reading doesn't calm the disciples; for that matter, the other miracles they've seen don't help them know what to expect from Jesus or who he is. Miracles can be ambiguous, even dangerous.

In the book Peace Like a River, by Leif Enger, the story's narrator, says, "Real miracles bother people, like strange sudden pains unknown in medical literature. . .They rebut every rule all we good citizens take comfort in. Lazarus obeying orders and climbing up out of the grave - now there's a miracle, and you can bet it upset a lot of folks who were standing around at the time."

Miracles may upset the status quo. That may be what the disciples feel, somewhere between awe and terror: the fear of being changed.

They're right to fear, because Jesus is indeed asking the disciples to change. The reason they're even on that boat is, Jesus is taking them from familiar territory, Capernaum, to the foreign land of the Gerasenes, where few rabbis would venture. Jesus is relentless in his pursuit of caring for all of God's children, and in the process he's moving his followers from being fishermen to disciples. He's preparing them to welcome a kingdom completely different from what they'd expected or wanted.

The change they're facing is real, and difficult, and inevitable. This is becoming clear as they see that the one who's asking them to change has control over the wind and the waves, is indeed the Holy One of God. That change will ultimately transform the followers, but they probably don't see that yet.

Many of us may fear change. Not the changes we plan for and anticipate, or even unexpected change, perhaps life-threatening. The change we may fear is the change that occurs when *we* are encountered by the living God and know that life will never be the same again.

One of my classmates in seminary who did his vicarage year on the North Shore in Nassau and now pastors a church in South Dakota, had the same call experience I had. We're of similar age, and both had a strong sense of call for years, that we each decided not to follow for years, until we each came to feel it was just overwhelming and we had to act on it. He used to say, "Don't ignore that call, because God's not going to stop just because you ignore it. God isn't *ever* going to leave you alone until you say, oh OKAY!"

In today's world, we tend to have a hard time with miracles, wanting to overlook them as examples of a bygone culture, like demons now being described as mental illness, to make

sense of them rationally. This morning the disciples witness a miracle and they know in a sort of terrifying insight that it'll change them forever.

Another quote from Peace Like a River: "People fear miracles because they fear being changed, though ignoring them will change you also." (No argument with that from me.)

So, what is confronting us here at Saint Andrew's? Where is God encountering us and inviting us to the other side of the lake, to change, to imagine anew what it means to be people of faith in this community, at this moment in time when our world has been through its own boat ride from hell?

How is God inviting us into the story? How will we be the messengers - apostles, angels, prophets - sent to God's people to share the most frequent promise in the Bible: Do not be afraid? Just as the disciples crossed the lake together and were frightened together, so may we consider our call together, as a community of faith, into a deeper relationship with the God who never leaves us unchanged. We may wonder and talk and dream of where we sense the presence and call of God. Of what's frightening, and what's even hopeful, about that miraculous, transformative call into new and abundant life. Amen.