



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

WAKE UP

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 24, 2018

JOB 38:1-11; PSALM 107:1-3,23-32; 2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-13; MARK 4:35-41

MARK 4:35-41 *[When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"]*

I know fear. I know what is like to be in a situation that rattles you to your core. Those situations where you fear for your life. Your mind runs free and your imagination takes over. Not your "good" imagination, but your pesky one. You know, the one that quickly conjures up the worst possible outcome. The one that tells you that the spider you saw at work somehow ended up in your bed. Or that the airline stewards did not properly seal the doors before take off, your seatbelt is broken, and your life float won't inflate and even though you are flying to Arkansas, your flight path takes you over the ocean. This is what is called an irrational fear. These irrational fears

coming in many different forms. From the small ones that we can look back and laugh at, to the big ones that keep you from engaging in certain situations.

I also know rational fear. The fears that are based in a present reality. The fear that comes when confronted by an aggressive lunging dog. A car speeding down your street while your kids are riding their bikes. The sound of a gunshot or fire alarm. These fears are based on something that is within reach.

Raise your hand if you are afraid of spiders?

Of clowns?

Of dogs?

Of walking home late at night by yourself?

Of getting pulled over by the cops?

If you've experienced fear, which I bet we all have, you know that it can be debilitating, paralyzing, and mentally draining.

As the McLaurin family begins preparing ourselves for our move to Tennessee in a week, I cannot help but think about the first week after I moved to Jackson, MS from Seattle when I was 8 years old. It was in the height of tornado season, and being from Seattle, we only knew rain. Not thunder that rumbled for hours, or lightning that lit up the sky, and definitely not tornados or tornado sirens. If you've ever lived in the south, you know the sound. It is one of the eeriest unnerving sounds you will ever hear. Still, to this day, when I hear those sirens, my heart beats faster and I begin to sweat.

It was maybe day two or three in Jackson when a storm rolled through. My grandmother, who we were living with at the time, scurried about the house rounding up flashlights and candles although there was still daylight. We were told to stay away from the phone (old school grandmother superstition). As we watched these dense dark greenish storm clouds slowly approach our side of town, the wind was eerily calm. Then we heard it. The tornado sirens. The siren for our neighborhood was on the light pole 20 or so yards from our house. It started soft but quickly picked up and seemed to summon the winds. Not knowing what was going on, my brother panicked and bolted out of the house. He was my rock and my

courage, so I bolted after him right on his heels. And my grandmother followed. When we were halfway down the street, we heard her scream "Get back in this house!" Truth be told, these are not the words she used, but what she said would NOT be church appropriate... This was all new to us. This was outside our reality. This whole scene did not make sense.

In today's reading, from the fourth chapter of Mark, we experience the fear of the disciples. At this point, they have already spent some time with Jesus on his preaching and healing tour in Galilee. They've witnessed him heal many, including Simon's mother-in-law, a leper, and a paralytic. He taught crowds about the Sabbath and began teaching in parables. The disciples at this point have been schooled. They are through orientation. When evening came on one of these days, Jesus said let us go to the other side. While they were in the water, I imagine they looked to the sky from the boat and saw those dense dark greenish clouds. They knew what this meant. I know this because four of them, Simon, Andrew, James, and John made their living in the water. They knew what it meant to be in the water during a storm. And a storm did come. A storm that beat and battered the boat and began flooding it with water. And they were terrified. They were afraid and this was a rational fear! They were so afraid that they woke Jesus from his sleep and questioned him. With which Jesus rebuked the storm and it calmed. Although the text says Jesus said "Why are you afraid. Have you still no faith." I imagine Jesus

saying, “chill, I got this.” There great awe of Jesus’s actions showed them that Jesus was working with a new reality. A reality that had been slowly revealed to them through healings and wisdom, and now even nature. Jesus’s power began to create a new understanding which meant an abandoning of the old.

When hearing this story, I am very much the disciples. I am the disciples in that I try and want to follow Jesus. But sometimes the boat begins to rock, and the winds begin to blow, and the treacherous sea begins to overtake of the boat. And all I can think to do is to say, “Jesus, Wake up!” I know I am not alone. I know I am not alone because I have heard it myself. I have heard this fear and confusion from my children, from your children, from you.

Most recently I have heard it from the news and Twitter and Facebook. It was heard in the audio of a small child screaming “Papa, Papa... I want my Papa.” as they were separated from there parents after a long journey to cross the border. Zero tolerance. We’ve got to better for those who are seeking refuge.

I heard it in a peel of bullets that rang out that shot 17-year-old Antwon Rose in the back as he ran from the Pittsburg Police. Three shots in the back. A young black male. Died in the hospital. Running because he was afraid. We’ve got to explore better policing tactics.

These are only two stories. These are only two examples of the rough storms we are enduring that have us afraid and confused.

Stories that remind us that we are not in control. These stories have us screaming louder and louder “Jesus...Wake up! Do you not care?”

But as Job discovers, we should be careful what questions we ask because we might not like the answer or non-answer in his case.

In the passage from Job, we hear the response from God to Jobs piercing question of “why is all of this happening?” At this point in the reading, Job has been through some things. In a day, his flock was stolen, his servants were killed, his ten children died in a storm, and he was inflicted with terrible sores. This righteous man lost everything.

Now, I must admit. I considered avoiding Job. This book is one of the most problematic in all the bible for me. In another sermon or forum, at another time we should delve into a deeper reading of Job. But avoid it we must not. We must probe it to hear what it has to say.

In God’s response to Job, which goes on for 3 more chapters, we are reminded of our limited knowledge, our limited control. We are reminded that the world works outside of our limited reality. On the surface, this stinks. Who wants to feel powerless? Who likes feeling like we have no control. But folks, I hate to tell you, we are not in control of it all. But this does not mean we are powerless. This does not mean we are supposed to sit back and let the storms overtake us.

As followers of Jesus, we know when we ask these questions, there is a question that is returned to us. “Will you follow me? Will you

trust that the way that I am revealing to you is the way.” This is to say, you may not know or fully understand what is all happening in the world, but will you follow me. Our call was summed up beautifully last week when Presiding Bishop Curry stood right up here and said, “Love God, Love your neighbor, and while you are at it, love yourself.” When we do this, I mean really live in the way of love, the world around us will begin to change.

And this love, this radical and revolutionary love, calls us to march for immigrants and

those seeking refuge. To boldly proclaim Black Lives Matter. To pray for our president by name. To believe our “enemies” are also worthy of love. It calls us to endure the storms because they will come. To seek and serve Christ, to respect the dignity of every human being, to strive for justice and peace.

This is where our lies power. This is where we are in total control. The power of love is infectious. And when experienced, everything it touches can and will be transformed.



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