

Creation 3 (Storm) Year C; 28/ 29 September 2019

St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

Patricia Kay Jue, lay preacher

We can not just stay by our own safe shore, fishing in the same waters. We may feel as if on a very small boat, tossed around, out of control. But in the boat of God's people, all people are important. God is there, beside us.

Job 28:20-27

Psalm 29

1 Corinthians 1:21-31

Luke 8:22-25

We sing of the wild winds and the dark clouds, the lightning flash and the thunder roll; the fierce gales and blinding rains, the crashing waves and swaying trees. And we celebrate God's presence in the midst.

In a world where there is so much uncertainty, chaos and change, God Creator, we look for words of wisdom and hope to see us through the storms of life. Open us to Your assurance, challenge and nourishment for the journey as we seek to walk in Your way. AMEN

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus and the disciples are in a boat. Simon, Andrew, James, and John are fishermen. They know the water. The shorelines of Sea of Galilee is their second home. They would have been used to launching off, catching enough fish for dinner and a bit more to dry in the sun, and returning to this shoreline home with the day's catch. So this day seemed to start out as another typical day. The water was calm, still enough for the exhausted Jesus to fall asleep. I imagine that there was no hint of the impending storm. Then, the day suddenly grows dark. The sea roared. The sky lights up for one brief flash. There is a loud clap above. And the rain comes pouring down. The wind picks up and waves start to dash the little boat. Water coming down. Water coming in. Water everywhere.

The Sea of Galilees is known for its sudden, violent storms. As fishermen, Simon, Andrew, James and John would have been used to these quickly forming thunder bursts. But in this Gospel story, they were very afraid. So we might image that this windstorm was a phenomenally bad one, worse than they ever had known. As we might call it today, the once-in-a-century sort of storm.

What would you do when your seven foot wide, four foot high boat is taking on water? Hold on tight? Bail water? Do anything to keep afloat, anything to keep the boat together...whatever it takes to stop sinking. You know, throw everything overboard to lighten the load, all the loose items that would be washed away anyway. Call all hands on deck... No time for slackers.

And so the four of them, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, find Jesus, still asleep during this storm of the century. "Master, Master, we are perishing!" We are perishing. We are going under. All is lost.

I have great sympathy for these four disciples, in their little fishing vessel, being tossed by the thrashing winds, soaked to the skin by the downpour of water, ever more fearful that more water will engulf them as they sink. As they cry out, Jesus calls out into the crash and chaos of the storm. All becomes calm, the howling winds quieted. The water return to the smooth glassiness. Everything is back to normal, except it is not, for Jesus asks the disciples, "Where is your faith?" Where indeed? What does it mean to have faith?

Several weeks ago, when I first started thinking about what I would preach, my focus was on the storm, on water, about the recent destruction of Hurricane Dorian, of the months to come of clean-up and rebuilding, of our collection envelopes for Episcopal Relief and Development to help those folks, of the increase of unpredictable weather due to climate change, about having faith, and taking action, of the importance of supporting each other in prayer...

After all, we are celebrating the Season of Creation. On this third week of year C, the theme is storm. Readings, hymns all focused on storms. But in reading and re-reading the story, in dwelling with the word, something else started to bubble up. Look back at the beginning of the story. Jesus says "Let us go across to the other side of the lake."

Up until this time, Jesus has been preaching on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, near his home town of Nazareth. The disciples are witness to the miracles. But now Jesus has said, we are going to do something different. For the Good News of the Gospel to encompass all people, we can not stay in one place. We can not do what has always been done. We can not just stay by our own safe shore, fishing in the same waters. It is not enough to keep our doors open and wait for folks to wander in. We have to go out, and be part of their community. Indeed, when Simon, Andrew, James and John head out across to the other side of the lake, their boat is transformed from local fishing vessel to transportation of the Gospel News. It is no longer a normal day of fishing, close to familiar shores, going about business as usual. They were going across, to the beyond. This storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee is part of Simon, Andrew, James, and John's very wet baptism, marking their growing discipleship, marking a new route in how to be faithful, marking them as Christ's own. Their world would never be the same.

The world is not the same as it was 15, 10, 5, 3 years ago. Our community has changed. The church institution is not the same as it was in our formative years. So I suggest to you that our mission as the community of the faithful is not to hang on to the old familiar shoreline but to set forth, to guide our little vessel of St. James' Clinton, to be transformative, and transforming.

We may feel as if on a very small boat, tossed around, out of control. Items may need to be jettisoned. Old fond habits may need to change. But in the boat of God's people, all people are important. No one gets thrown overboard to lighten the load. During the storms of our lives, we may want to shout out our anger. We may wallow in feelings of abandonment. But remember, God is with us in the boat. God. The Maker of Heaven and Earth. Faith... Faith during the times of change. Faith that G-d is there.

I leave you with these words from the Christian Maori of New Zealand

The wild winds and the dark clouds,  
the lightning flash and the thunder roll.  
The fierce gales and blinding rains,  
the crashing waves and swaying trees.  
Where is God in all of this?  
Where is God in the storm?  
Where is God in the tornado?  
Where is God in the tsunami?  
As crucified Christ, identifying with the grieving.  
As risen Christ, providing comfort and hope.  
Yes, where is our God in all of this?  
God is there, beside us,  
Through it all.

AMEN