

Pentecost III (Proper 7; Year B, RCL)

Sermon delivered by the Rev'd A. Robert Hirschfeld, Rector
Grace Church, Amherst

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Texts: Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

This is the gospel in miniature. Jesus invites us to the other side. And he'll take us there, but only if we trust in his power to save us. Actually, even if we don't trust in his power to save us, we are still going to get to the other side.

This is the gospel in miniature. Many of us know just what Jesus might mean when he invites us to the other side. Others may have absolutely no idea what he's talking about. Of course, on the surface, when Jesus says to his disciples, "Let's go across to the other side," he means to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But what does going over to the other side mean to you and me, even now, even here?

So let me tell the story again. Because when we tell this story, the story we've just heard, we're hearing the whole Gospel. The whole gospel. People used to say Mark was a hack writer. He used crude uneducated language. His gospel was so short because, well maybe, he didn't quite get the whole story in all its nuance and sophistication. Well, try again. This writer was a writer. Mark is poet...he is a maker a meaning. This is a story of power, a kind of power that's going to change our lives.

So Jesus leaves the crowds. He's been teaching about sowers and seeds and scythes and harvests and mustard seeds and shade trees and how they all point to Realm of God beaking into our lives. But he's had enough teaching. Now he wants to show something. He wants to check out what's on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. So he says, "Look. Let's get in the boats and get to the other side." And it's a heck of a time to start, in fact it was the worst time. It's evening, night's falling. What a lousy time to get in the boats for a sail of some 10 or 15 miles. No flashlight or GPS system, no radio, nothing. But they embark. Given it's night, and Jesus has been preaching and teaching all day, he pulls up a cushion in the stern of the boat and falls asleep. Jesus falls asleep. Jesus, just as he is, falls asleep.

And then the storms begins to rage. Trouble begins.

What good is a Savior who is a sleep when the waves of your life are crashing all around you? What good is a savior who checks out when the storms of life are raging? What good is a God who won't protect you when you're starting to sink and it's so obvious your life is going down to the pit? What good is a God who allows the earth to choke to death,

that allows protesters for justice to get beaten to death in the streets, that allows the self-righteous to torture and detain? What good is a god that allows committed gays and lesbians to suffer in silent shame while heterosexuals indulge in pornography, infidelity, and domestic abuse all protected by their constitutional rights? Don't you care, teacher, that we are perishing? Don't you care, O God, that we're 600,000 in debt, and that we still haven't finished the landscaping for the garth? Don't you care, O God, that our priests wear brown shoes, and the acolytes can never remember to stop twirling their cinctures? Doesn't God care that my retirement account has sunk and the bills keep rising? Don't you care, O Lord who welcomed children, that Mark's Meadow School is closing? That the plight of women in the Congo is so horrible that we can't even mention what happens to them in church? Don't you care that my mother's been diagnosed with Alzheimers and my son struggles with Autism? That the unemployment index is the highest it's been since the mid-eighties? Doesn't God care that by some reckoning there is more slavery in the world than there was in the 1800's, that if we want to talk about apartheid we could first look to the contrast the schools of Amherst and Springfield? Doesn't anyone care about the quiet suffering of the nursing homes with its faint but pervasive smell of urine and ammonia. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

The sea is not a place of renewal and recreation in the Bible before it is a place of death, destruction, chaos, annihilation. And this story we just heard of Jesus waking up on the water to rebuke the chaos of the storm. This is the Gospel in miniature.

Because Jesus, just as he is --did you notice that little phrase, just as he is?-- a human being in the same boat as you and me, Jesus wakes up. He wakes up from his sleep, wakes up from his little miniature tomb where his head rested on a little pillow, just like they give the dead people at the funeral homes, and he wakes up. This is the gospel in miniature. Peace! Be Still. And if he's quoting the psalm, as he often did, even on the cross, it's to say, Be Still and Know that I am God! (Psalm 46:11)

Jesus is awake. We think Jesus might be asleep at the switch. But I don't think believe he is. This this the Gospel in miniature. "Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again."

One preacher (Austin Ferrar) said that if he had to summarize the Gospel of Mark into three lines those three lines would be these:

God gives you everything.
Give everything to God.
You can't.

If we were to summarize the story of the Stilling of the Storm into three lines, they might be these:

God is the Lord of all creation.
Trust that God will still every storm in your life.
You can't.

But here's the Gospel...in fact you can, because in Jesus, we "just as we are" made to be Christ in the world. It's our calling to come to a new understanding of ourselves.

We are already dead. The Storm has already capsized our boat. If you think otherwise, think again...go across to Hastings and pick up the newspaper. The boat's already overturned, brothers and sisters. Humanity is already sunk. But in Christ, we have already gotten to the other side. This morning we celebrate having crossed the Great Divide between death and Eternal Life. Jesus, the Crucified and the Risen One, just as he is, has made us, just who we are, human and yet sharing his divinity. We are about becoming the ones who cross over to the other side and rebuke our demons. United with Christ, we roll up our sleeves and get to work to make a better society, but without all the anger, the anxiety, the righteous rhetoric, the shame. Instead, we seek to sail through the storms of life in the power of the Word that says: Peace. Be still!

This water has already drowned us, the youngest to the oldest among us. We are already dead, but now alive in the one who woke up for us, on the sea of Galilee, from his tomb in Jerusalem. Jesus wakes up in our hearts and souls, wakes up this morning even here in this community of Grace Church in Amherst to say, Peace. Be Still. Be Still. Now heal and raise others from the dead, feed the poor, bring good news to those who are in prison, comfort and support the grieving and the depressed. Come, members of the Crucified and Risen Christ, let us go to the other side. For they need peace and love and life over there, too.

This is the Gospel in miniature, so let's do a gospel thing in miniature. I'm not one to indulge in liturgical gimmicks, but let's try this. When we exchange the Peace, the same Peace Jesus utters over the tumultuous waters, let's go to the other side, to to the other side of the Church, and pass the peace. Who knows, you might bring salvation to someone today without even knowing it...for you are Christ, once again, this easter Sunday (in miniature) God is not asleep in you, but has risen! As Paul reminds us:

"We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always

rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Amen.