

6.23.2024 Pentecost 5

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Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, 14-17; Mark 4:35-41

“Why are you afraid?”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s gospel begins with Jesus saying to his disciples, “*Let us go across to the other side.*” These words reveal that no boundary or border can stop or limit Jesus’ mission of love to all people. The Sea of Galilee, like any large lake, river, ocean, or mountain represents a border or boundary to be crossed by Jesus in mission to others.

One of the difficult things about reading discrete passages of scripture in worship is that often we lose the context of the narrative. In today’s gospel where was this place Jesus called “the other side?” It was the place called the land of the Gerasenes, and there Jesus would heal a man possessed by an unclean spirit named “Legion.” Jesus knew he had work to do in restoring a man to health in body, mind, and spirit. This was the purpose of traveling by boat to the other side, yet his disciples did not seem to understand where they were going with Jesus in mission to “the other side.”

Crossing to other side, Jesus was asleep in the boat because it was the only place he could get some much-needed rest from the crowds that were following him. The core of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen, and so Jesus slept trusting in their ability to navigate the boat. Imagine his surprise at being woken by them as they panicked that the boat was sinking in a sudden storm.

Jesus spoke words of peace and calm, and the storm ceased. He turned to his disciples and asked, “*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*” There were really two storms that day: a temporary storm on a lake, and the storm of fear the disciples’ hearts.

Jesus’ question, “*Why are you afraid?*” is also a question for each of us. What are the storms in your heart today? What is making you fearful, anxious, or even at times causing you to panic? I see fear around me everywhere I look today. People are afraid for the future; they are afraid of difference; they are afraid of diversity; they are afraid of their neighbors, they are afraid of other nations, other ethnicities, genders and identities. People are worried about the economic future, about climate change and increasing heat and violent storms far beyond anything on the lake that day. “*Why are you afraid?*” is Jesus’ question to each of us.

Today’s gospel isn’t simply about a one-time event in which God’s Son calmed a storm. If it were, this story might be long forgotten. This story is about the miracle of faith amid the storms of life, allowing us to know peace, grace, and hope so that we might act with Christ. Jesus is with us so

that we might travel “*across to the other side*” with a new vision of working in mission with Christ. The ongoing miracle is faith that gives us a vision for mission in this place each day.

The center of this story is that the disciples had Jesus in the boat with them, yet they were afraid. Jesus was with them, yet they did not believe in his vision to “*go across to the other side.*” Like the phrase, “we’re all in this boat together,” the boat represents humanity living together in community on many different levels.

The boat is one of the oldest symbols of the church: a boat sailing on the stormy seas of this world with Jesus Christ as its pilot. We often sit in a section of this sanctuary called the “nave,” which comes from a Latin word, *navis*, meaning “ship,” which is also the origin of the word “navy.” Early Christians understood themselves as traveling through this world with Jesus piloting the church amid the stormy seas of this world.

The boat can also represent this entire planet Earth and all people who are “in this boat together” as one human race. There is a good illustration of this, and perhaps you know the photo. On July 19, 2013, NASA’s Cassini spacecraft was passing the planet Saturn, and NASA commanded Cassini to turn toward Earth, taking a photo of Saturn. Cassini was on “the other side” 870 million miles from Earth when the photo was taken, and in the background, Earth appears as a tiny speck of light in a vast universe. This is us and we are in this boat together. Humanity’s every fear and hope, every word and every action take place on this tiny speck of light called Earth. I wish every school child could see this photo that we might learn to work together as human beings to navigate life’s storms.

The boat also represents the individual storms and fears we each face in life: sickness, loss of work, anxiety about loved ones, aging, and our own mortality of death and dying. The boat represents our humanity, and the disciples’ cry, “*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*” Yet Jesus is with us in the boat. Jesus continues to calm the storms in our lives through faith. Jesus’ mission is cosmic, and it is personal. He lives that we might never die. He lives in you so this world might know life, hope, and love through you.

As a church, Jesus is always traveling with us so we might work in new ways for God’s mission in this world. Why are you afraid? Why are you afraid of going to the other side with Jesus? Why are you afraid of crossing boundaries and borders that separate people from the love of God in Christ Jesus? He is with you in the boat so that you might go to help others.

Daily, the world is filled with fear, and I have about 15 minutes on Sunday to speak to you. Yet 24 hours a day, seven days a week, a legion of voices possessed by spirits of hatred, disunity, and

war fill us with dread and fear about the future: the fear of difference, the fear of diversity, and the fear of our neighbors whom Jesus also loves. Why are you afraid? Jesus is with you in the boat.

I have never told you this, but soon after arriving in 2019, someone said to me, “Congratulations, Pastor Tim, you have been called to a dying church.” I have been thinking about these words because they are words of fear. You see, I don’t look at it that way. I have been called to a church piloted by Jesus Christ at a very stormy time in this world. We have traveled through two and a half years of a global pandemic, followed by a rapidly growing global crisis of disunity and war. Recently, I heard someone wonder if we are not “sleepwalking into World War 3.” Never in the past 50 years have there been such storms of division and hatred with so many voices possessed by fear hatred, and mistruth. Yet Jesus is with us in the boat of this church, and yet we listen to every possessed voice in this world except his voice which alone speaks truth granting calm, peace, and healing.

As your pastor, I seek to follow no other voice but Jesus’ voice in this world. His voice offers truth, hope, and unity. This why we welcome all people into this place because we are all God’s children. This is why we seek to create circles of friendship and partnership around this church so that more and more people will know Jesus is in this place. This is why we are calling an associate pastor to help us embody Jesus’ love to evermore people in our community. Jesus is here with us. Why are you afraid?

When the new associate pastor is eventually called, I will not greet that person as I was greeted with words of fear. Instead, I will say, “Let us go across to the other side in mission with Jesus. Jesus is with us, and we are his body in this place.”

To be a Christian is to follow Jesus’ voice wherever he leads, trusting he will provide and equip us with all we need. To be a Christian is to live from a place of faith and hope, not from a place of fear and scarcity.

Why are you afraid? Amid life’s fears, believe that he is with you. In a world where people are perishing, Jesus needs you.

Jesus is in the boat. We already possess everything we need. Why are you afraid? Amen.