

LENTEN MESSAGE FOR FEBRUARY 24, 2021

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Evening prayer services are a chance to rest in God. A reminder that we are held in God's care and can therefore let go of our consciousness, our illusions of control, the fullness of our days and trust the God of all creation as we approach sleep.

In tonight's scripture text it is evening. They have left the crowds of the day behind them and taken Jesus into the boat with them "just as he was."

Jesus has said to them "Let us go across to the other side." In the book of Mark, the crossing of the sea signals the crossing of traditional boundaries. Jesus is calling them to cross into the unknown, the often forbidden, the foreign, the unclean. This time they are crossing into foreigner's territory where they will encounter a man living in the tombs, possessed with demons.

The disciples often experience anxiety in the crossing. What are they to find on the east bank of the Sea of Galilee? What awaits them?

Jesus and the disciples have left one shore and have not yet reached the other side. They leave behind the weight of the day and anticipate the unknown that approaches. They do not necessarily even know how long the journey will take.

In the midst of the sea, in the middle of the night, in this transition from shore to shore, a great windstorm arises and the boat is beaten and swamped. One wonders if this storm might be representative of the storms within the disciples themselves.

But in this boat, between the shores, Jesus sleeps. Jesus leaves behind the same day that the disciples travel away from and awaits the same shore on the other side. The storm rattles and threatens and the disciples panic "we are perishing...something must be done" but Jesus sleeps.

Why is Jesus able to sleep through the storm? Because despite the crowds that lay behind and the boundary breaking ministry that lies ahead and the dark seas that threaten to swamp to boat right where they are - Jesus trusts that God remains God.

Awoken from his sleep by the disciples Jesus says to the wind and sea "Peace! Be still!" and there is dead calm. He then turns to the disciples and says "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Despite the anxieties we brew up within ourselves, despite creation's ability to storm - God is still Creator of all.

"Peace! Be still!"

The disciples are filled with great awe and say to one another “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him!”

This is God. God who stands on the shore amidst the crowds, God who crosses boundaries and breaches new shores, God who is with us in the boat. Jesus does not sleep as to abandon the disciples in their time of need. Jesus sleeps confident that God is the God of all creation, holding all things in the promise of his eternal care.

“Peace! Be Still!”

We may identify with the disciples right now, in a time of crossing and uncertainty. In this pandemic time, we remember what lies on the shores we have left behind and we are unsure of what awaits us on approaching shores. We aren’t sure how long this time of travel between what was and what will be will last. It causes great storms to brew within us – sometimes longing to return to the crowds we have left behind, sometimes frantic to reach the new land, even as we are anxious about what new challenges it will bring. It is in this boat that we cry out to Jesus and hear him say “Peace! Be Still!” Rest in the God of all creation.

Our cycles of day and night urge us to a practice of remembering. As we leave behind the crowdedness of the day and wonder about what tomorrow may bring – as we wrestle to rest – we are called to remember.

Luther ended every evening with this evening prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen

He then awoke every morning and began his day with this morning prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen

Luther recognized God with us from shore to shore, our days and our nights held by the God of all creation. “Peace! Be Still!” This is the Lenten practice: the return to God, the resting, the trusting in our steadfast God.

So this evening, as you glance back at the shores we leave behind and squint to see the shores that lie ahead – this evening as storms threaten and you feel the waves rocking your boat – see Jesus with you at rest. Hear Jesus say “Peace! Be Still! Do not be afraid but have faith in the God of all creation.”