

Sermon for June 20, 2021

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In today's Gospel story we hear the account of Jesus calming the wind and the waves – Peace, be still. But before this text presents an image of an all powerful God, stopping the storm with a rebuke, it presents us with an image many of us may find troublesome. Questions arise when we realize that the storm came while Jesus was in the boat with the disciples. The storm came in spite of Jesus' presence and raged with strong winds that caused waves to beat into and swamp the boat. Jesus was there and yet the storm came and continued creating anxiety and fear in the disciples. Jesus slept while the storm had its initial impact. Why? Why didn't Jesus stop the storm before it started? Why if he had the power to stop it did he sleep, allowing fears to arise?

We have most certainly heard these wonderings over the past pandemic year. Huddled in our little boats, the storm of this virus beating against our bows, bringing great anxiety and fear, haven't we wondered why is God sleeping? If God is our all powerful God, why does the storm rage on?

Our gospel text today is matched in our lectionary with scripture from the book of Job. Job was a righteous man who lived as God commanded. The text tells of an account between God and "the Satan" or an adversary. Satan challenges Job's love for God, stating that it is only because of what God gives and the fear of punishment and reward that Job is faithful. Satan asks "Does anyone love God for nothing?" Then the whole book goes on to tell the account of God allowing Satan to bring difficulty upon Job. Job loses his livestock, his servants, his children, his house and all his belongings. He then experiences extreme suffering with physical bodily sores. And his friends ask "What have you done that God would allow this to happen?" For chapters Job continues to give account of his faithfulness, while wrestling with why. Why when God has the ability to control all powers that rage against us, does God allow bad things, adverse things, to happen? For many the book raises more questions than answers.

These questions of Why storms? Why suffering? Why bad things? cut to the heart of our faith. Like Job's friends, the world has tried to explain with a wide range of incompetent answers. What are we to do with what we cannot explain? This is not a sermon with answers.

Many years ago following Hurricane Katrina I had the opportunity to travel with a group of our Trinity youth to New Orleans. As we drove through neighborhoods where all that remained were cement stairs to front doorways that had been washed away and heard stories from individuals who watched as family members died beside them without needed supplies, the question hung tangible in the air. Why? Why if Jesus can calm wind and waves in one rebuke – why did the storm rage? The people, like Job, spoke of accusations from outsiders "What have you done that God allowed this to happen?"

One afternoon we attended a community craft fair in an area park. There we met one artist who sketched drawings to tell the story of Katrina. One such picture was of the Superdome, where thousands had retreated for shelter. Above the dome the artist had drawn the powerful image of a crying man, embracing the scene below. He explained that while people questioned where God was during the storm, that this was his response. He did not know why God didn't stop it but he knew where God remained.

Another artist's booth displayed beautiful rugged wooden crosses. Every cross had been made out of the rubble the storm left behind. The crosses were crafted from the remains of people's homes. They too understood the presence of Christ amidst the suffering of the storm even amidst the unanswerable questions of why storms arise.

As the disciples recover in their boat after the storm we do not hear them raise questions of "why," rather they ask "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?"- "Who then is this?" Despite the storms that rage - Who do we know God to be?

The artists in New Orleans did not find themselves dwelling on the question of "why" but rather exploring the question of "Who do they know God to be?" In the midst of the storm they had come to know God as the one who cried along with them, embracing his beloved people. As they looked at the rubble the storm left behind their "whys" were swallowed up in the who they knew God to be, a God who revealed Godself on a cross. A God who endured the storm out of great love for the world.

In the Job scripture we hear God ask Job a series of questions - questions that come down to God asking Job who is the Creator of all that is and who is Job in the vastness. For chapters God speaks asking "who did this? can you?" Finally Job responds "I am of small account" and "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

In asking "Who do you know God to be?" Job was not only reminded of his smallness, his awareness of his limited knowledge and understanding, but he also was reminded of the vastness of his Creator and his being a beloved creation of God.

Today we celebrate baptism. We are splashed with the same waters that sometimes swamp our boats and threaten to take us under. In baptism we become keenly aware of our limited knowledge and understanding but claim the mystery of our identity as beloved creations of God. We do not pretend that we will be shielded from all storms. As Paul wrote in our second reading today we expect there will be times of great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, riots, hunger, labors, sleepless nights. Splashed with the promises of God, we are gifted faith to continue to ask, to wrestle with "Who do we know our God to be?" even amidst our inability to understand the whys.

Yes – Jesus eventually calmed the storm, God eventually returned Job to abundant life BUT the storms, the hardships came. We often strive to find hope in the answer to why. Instead maybe our hope must be found in knowing the "Who", that even when we cannot begin to

comprehend, even in the unexplainable, God remains with us. Jesus may have been asleep but he stayed in the boat. God may have allowed Job adversity but he did not abandon him. The next time you find yourself asking “why” I invite you to join those New Orleans artists. Sketch your image of who you know God to be. Gather up the rubble and find the expression of God’s presence amidst the pain. Stand once again in awe at the “who” that overpowers our nagging troublesome whys.

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” We are of small account and utter what we do not understand; may we be drawn back into the vastness of our God.