**Why Are You Afraid?**

**Matthew 8:23-27**

4th Sunday after Epiphany

01.30.2022

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

Foolishly, Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord by getting on a ship to Tarshish. God had commanded him to go preach repentance to Nineveh, but as a good Hebrew, he did not want to preach repentance to Assyrians in their capital city. He was afraid that if he preached God’s word of repentance, they would repent. I know, “Isn’t that the point?” But, if they repented, Jonah knew that God would not punish them. Selfishly, he did not want them to repent, but to be punished.

So, Jonah hops a ship to Tarshish, promptly finding a spot in the inner part of the ship and fell asleep. The captain comes to him and says, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

Jonah knows why this storm is wracking this boat. It is his sin that has brought about this situation. He is guilty of running away from the Lord. He is compelled by the casting of lots to confess his sinful responsibility. While He cannot calm the storm, he knows who can. In repentance, he tells them to cast him overboard.

Hardened seafarers see the storm abated, “ceased from its raging.” They knew it was Jonah’s God, the God of the Hebrews who did this. So, these men immediately offered a sacrifice to Him and made vows to Him as their Savior from death.

It is a thousand years later. A boat is being swamped as another storm is tossing the seas so that hardened seafaring men are afraid of perishing. Again, there is another man asleep in the boat during such a storm. Jesus’ disciples woke Him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”

How could He even be sleeping through such a storm? He was exhausted! He had been preaching and had healed many. Isaiah declares that He carried our pain and bore our suffering. (Is. 53:4) He was taking into Himself, into His own flesh the sinfulness of those whom He healed, removing from them their illnesses and carrying them in His own body. Is it any wonder He could sleep through such a storm?

Upon their waking Him, what are His words to them? “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Note that He is not upset with their waking Him. Indeed, He does not even address what it is that has made them afraid. Instead, He inquires about the fact that they are disturbing themselves, that in this moment, they are having a crisis of faith. Why are you filled with fear? Why is your faith failing? At the same time, His calm in the midst of that which terrifies them should also bring them peace.

This is a sharp rebuke of His disciples. Why had they awoken Him? Was it because they knew Him to be the Lord, and their hope was in Him? Or, was it that they were terrified at this stormy situation out to sea? Their later comments show they were not trusting Him as God.

They know Him as a miracle worker, but they do not recognize God in the boat with them. Had His falling asleep led them to think Him only a man with human weakness? Of course, this is no mere man who would allow them to perish. With the most important thing settled, the issue of their faith, He then rebukes the storm – the winds and the sea.

At the calming of the winds and sea, the mariners left on the boat which had carried Jonah had a better response. Although they each had other gods they previously worshipped, at the calming of the sea they recognized the hand of the true God, and offered sacrifices to the Lord and made vows.

In the boat with Jesus are His disciples, but they show that they still do not understand who is in the boat with them. As the great calm comes at Christ’s rebuke, they are befuddled, saying, “What sort of MAN is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?”

No mere man! The God-Man, Jesus, God’s Christ.

You know dear friends the storms which toss us about as we travel the tempestuous seas of life. We are in the boat with Jesus, a part of the holy ark of Christendom. We know who Christ is! We know what Christ is capable of! But too often we think of Him as sleeping in the back of the boat as if He does not care.

The winds of the world sweep over us, the ship appears on the verge of sinking. Sea spray crashes over the gunwale and splashes our face – Scripture’s teachings about human sexuality are outdated.

A looming wave threatens to crash over the bow – will this surgery bring me healing, or will it only expose the greater depth of the cancer?

Another wave tips the deck of the ship, our footing precarious – the shelves at Econo were empty of so many of our regular items, will there be anything next week?.

Salt water stings our eyes as another wave crashes and rocks us back on our heels – Omicron is today, will there be another variant tomorrow?

Yes, there are many tribulations that assault us almost daily. It looks like the boat may be swamped or simply torn apart by the storms. We cry out, “Save us Lord; we are perishing.” We do not see Him in the boat with us. All we see are the waves, the wind, the crazy rocking of the deck beneath our feet. All seems lost!

Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?

We need to pray our collect for today:

Almighty God, who knows us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end.

It may appear that we are perishing, but Christ has already shed His blood to save you. Jesus gave His life upon the cross to make you His very own. He will not abandon you now, nor fail you.

Yes, you will face personal storms and tribulations; it may be personal suffering or the suffering of those you love. At times, the Lord will allow you to be pitched about and thrown around until you despair and confess that your seamanship skills are not up to the task, you will admit, “There is nothing I can do to save myself from this.” According to our sinfully, prideful, human, flesh, this is a humiliating admission of vulnerability.

For believers, however, this is an honest confession of our helplessness apart from God. It is an incredible blessing when we abandon all hope in ourselves and trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is freeing to know that in our sufferings, we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. That He suffered for us, and has carried our suffering in His own flesh – ultimately upon the cross. He does not desire you to perish – instead He Himself perishes upon the cross to give you life.

When battered by personal storms, confess your desire to trust in yourself and your lack of trust in Him; and rejoice, for He has died to forgive such sins.

We live in a world of storms, and each of you may have to endure more than what you feel is your fair share. It is also a world in which you live as both a sinner and a saint. As such, you will view each of those storms with both doubt and faith as you are tossed back and forth.

Why are you afraid? Christ has gathered you to Himself in the water of baptism. You are united to Him. He has gathered you into His boat, the Church. Storms will come and go, but Christ remains the same with His mercy. His Word comes to you, strengthening faith and removing fear. He is present with His body and blood to feed and nourish your faith.

He invites you to stay in the boat, for here in the boat with Him, He safely carries you through this world’s storms to life everlasting. This same Jesus who calmed the storm, also proclaims to you, “Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Yes, in faith we do cry out to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We want to be forgiven and strengthened in faith. We know that only He is the strength we need to live each day of our life. “Save us, Lord!” And He does! Amen.