

***Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York***

Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York

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*Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 20, 2021*

*Job 38:1-11*

*2 Corinthians 6:1-13*

*Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32*

*Mark 4:35-41*

*Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!*

“Why are you afraid? Do you not yet trust God, whose rule is present in me?” (Mark 4:40b.) This is the question for all of us – every day. We know that we have been saved by the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ, but we still are afraid to trust in Jesus’s presence as our companion through life.

Mark presents Jesus as having been busy since his baptism by John in the Jordan River. He had called the disciples (Mark 1:17-20); exorcised a demon from a man in Capernaum (1:23-27); healed Simon’s mother-in-law (1:30-31); healed and exorcised others throughout Galilee (1:32-34); healed a leper (1:40-44); healed a paralyzed man lowered through the roof (2:3-5); healed a man with a withered hand (3:1-5); silenced unclean spirits (3:11-12); and taught in parables and other forms of speech throughout the region of Galilee (Mark 1-40). The disciples had been present for these works of power, but they still were unclear about who their leader and teacher was. This is true throughout Mark’s Gospel: the demons and unclean spirits recognized Jesus, his authority and power more readily than did the Disciples.

But then came the day when Jesus had been teaching into the evening and he wanted a break from the crowds, so he told the primary disciples that they should go across the Sea of Galilee “to the other side.” (4:35) He was tired from having taught all day, so he took a nap in the boat. As they were into the body of water (which was really a lake, although called “sea,”) a fierce wind came up, working the waves to heights that began to swamp the boat. This wasn’t an unusual occurrence for this body of water, but the extent of the threat that the weather presented this evening seemed greater than usual and deeply frightened the disciples.

They called for Jesus (who was still sleeping in the boat) to save them. He used the same words of exorcism he had used to cure people on the wind and waves, forces of nature: “Be silent! Be muzzled!” (4:39.) The disciples asked Jesus if he didn’t care that they were perishing (1:38). But it wasn’t that he didn’t care; he just wasn’t feeling threatened. He knew these forces of nature and he treated them as he had others that threatened the abundant life of people. He spoke words that calmed the sea and removed the threat of

death. Yet, even after having seen all of Jesus' works of power, the disciples didn't recognize who he was when he acted for their safety; they were terrified (4:41).

We may not experience the threat of being drowned at sea, but we certainly have faced the threat of death during this last fifteen months. More than 600,000 people in this country and more than three and a half million world-wide have perished. Some people have denied the lethal nature of COVID-19. Some have taken precautions, isolated themselves and been vaccinated when it became possible. Many have prayed to God for relief from the effects of the disease.

We can see as God's presence among us, acting to remove the threat of death, the prompt action of medical workers who warned us how to deal with the infection to slow the spread, and the immediate response of scientists who went to work with vaccine methods that had been in development before, to bring vaccines to the state of readiness for application very rapidly. So, do we experience God's presence among us in that way? Or are we afraid?

It was at this time of year in 1530 that some faithful men (yes, they were all men) who trusted God and their Savior, Jesus Christ, acted on faith and in conscience and against the Pope and the power of the Holy Roman Empire to present what has come to be known as the Augsburg Confession.

Our ancestors in faith, Martin Luther and his colleague, Prof Dr. Philipp Melanchthon, had decided that they had to adopt a posture that might result in their deaths. And they were joined by many other evangelical believers.

Luther had been writing against some of the practices of the Roman Church – like the use of indulgences – for some years, since as early as 1517. The Pope had excommunicated him from the church (and that was the only church in the Western world at that time, so they were excommunicated from the church). The Pope called him a heretic in the year 1521. For this reason, his life was in danger, but he had the protection of his Prince, who agreed with him about theology and church practices. There had been violence between those loyal to Pope Leo X and Emperor Charles V, on the one hand, and those who were loyal to Luther, on the other.

So, the Pope and Emperor invited those who followed Luther to present to the Imperial Diet (the congress of the Empire), that would meet in Augsburg “so that we all may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church and unity... .” Gritsch, Eric W. And Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism*, pp. 21-22).

Melanchthon wasn't sure about the Empire's good will in this enterprise, but nevertheless, he wrote what Luther, he and their colleagues had been thinking and teaching. Today we

call that document “The Augsburg Confession.” In addition to the authors, seven territorial princes and two city Councils signed the document to signify their support. And on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June in 1530, Melanchthon presented what had been written in front of the Emperor and the princes of the Holy Roman Empire. He may have been afraid of the consequences, but he wasn’t lacking in faith! He trusted God, who was present in the Holy Spirit.

The response? There was no discussion. There was no adoption of a theology that presented on single and true religion. The Pope’s spokesperson refuted all that Luther’s people had presented. Now there was more danger for those who had signed the Confession – maybe death. Some of the leaders were imprisoned, for a long as 25 years, after the death of Luther in 1546.

But Luther, Melanchthon and their colleagues remained committed to clarifying and teaching their understanding of the Bible and the theology they drew from it. They never lost trust in God. They never thought that they should stop because the Pope and the Emperor acted against them.

We can learn from these grandfathers in faith – we can take heart from their courage and their trust in God’s protection. We can thank our fathers in faith for the model of their trust in God on this Father’s Day. We can hear, also, what Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, that “[N]ow is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor. 6:2b)

So, my friends, now is the acceptable time for God – the time when we can work on earth for the coming of the realm of heaven – now is the time when we are called to discern the future mission of our Churches – and to plan how we can complete that mission.

Although we have been slowed down during the pandemic’s isolation, it is now time for preparations to return to in-person worship. It is also time for efforts to be made to renew stewardship and biblical Christian education. It is time for service to grow and reach more and more members of the community.

These are all considerations for which now is the acceptable time! When we attend worship every week, when we study Scripture, when we pray together, we’ll learn how God is calling us to serve. Because now is the acceptable time!

Are we afraid? Or do we trust God, whose rule is present in our world today through the Holy Spirit?

C: We trust; we have faith!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen