

The Sermon Today's sermon is provided by the ELCIC Summer Sermon Series where sermons are written by the Bishops and their assistants for clergy and parishes to assist both in preparation for Sundays. Sometimes a sermon speaks just as good if not better than we can preach. For the celebration of National Indigenous Peoples' Day Deacon Michelle Collins provides us with one such sermon.

Deacon Michelle Collins, MNO Synod

Today we begin by acknowledging World Refugee Day on June 20 and National Indigenous People's Day on June 21. We give thanks for the gifts these communities bring to the church and the world, and pray for all those involved in strengthening, supporting and advocating for the marginalized and vulnerable in our society.

The kingdom of God is like a group of disciples who get into a boat to cross over to the other side of a lake. The winds blow and the waves crash, and the disciples cry out in fear that the forces of nature may overwhelm and destroy them. In fear and desperation these disciples cry out, only to realize that the one who has authority to calm the storm is in the storm with them.

With a backdrop of parables and stories about the kingdom of God that are sometimes confusing and hard to understand, we get this dramatic story about Jesus calming the storm. From hidden messages of seeds and lamps explained in private, we now get a story of crashing waves, blowing wind and terrified disciples. Earlier stories of the invisible life energy in mustard seeds are now contrasted with this story of the cosmic energy of wind and waves.

So, in the context of the surrounding narrative, this story in Mark reminds us that Jesus' focus is on demonstrating that the Kingdom of God has come near. It is here and it is now, and it is

present in the lived experience of the community. It's interesting to remember that there's no traditional resurrection appearance in the earliest versions of Mark. Instead, throughout this gospel, we get glimpses of the resurrected Christ active and present in the world throughout Jesus' life and ministry.

The resurrection is more than a one-time event for Mark, who instead folds the resurrection into the many ways Jesus brings light and life into the darkness and death around him—the kingdom of God is here. The kingdom of God is now. The kingdom of God encompasses the whole of creation. So yes, this is a story about Jesus calming a storm.

But it is also a parable—a story that points us to broader and deeper understandings of God's reign and of us as God's people. And so, like with other parables, we read it with some holy imagination, and we play with various aspects of the story as we uncover and discover deeper and deeper lessons and insights about God's presence and action in the world and God's relationship with us.

We find the disciples in a boat, crossing over to the other side of the lake after a long day of teaching and tending to the needs of the community. Some of Jesus' teaching makes sense and is lifegiving. Other aspects of Jesus' teaching remain a bit of a mystery to these disciples. And yet, when Jesus invites them to join him in going to a new place, the disciples do it. They may have questions. They may not always understand Jesus correctly.

Sometimes they may downright get it wrong. But when Jesus invites them to follow, the disciples usually respond. Today is no different. Jesus invites them to go to the other side of the lake, and there's no evidence that they have any concern about it. Jesus is with them. Some of them are fishermen. It's a familiar lake that they're crossing. This should be fine, right? Well, it was

not fine. The winds pick up and soon the disciples find themselves in a storm. A sudden weather event probably wasn't unusual for this body of water. The combination of the shallow water, the surrounding hills and mountains, and the direction of the wind meant that there were often sudden storms on this lake. The disciples find themselves in a storm, and there's something about this storm that causes them to cry out in fear and desperation.

And when they do, they are reminded that Jesus is still in the boat. The invitation to cross over to the other side comes from Jesus, and he is still with them in this boat. He stays in the boat with the disciples throughout this tumultuous crossing. Jesus is in the boat, and with a reminder that the force of God is stronger than the force of nature, he rebukes the storm and invites the disciples into deeper trust and faith. The power and presence of God is real and active, and has the ability to provide calm and rest in the midst of a storm. The kingdom of God is here. The kingdom of God is now.

Over the last year, there have been plenty of ways to use the imagery of a storm to speak to the chaos and disruption we find ourselves in, even as it is clear that as a church, as a society, and maybe even as a world, we are moving into new territory—we are crossing over to another side. And in the process of this crossing, we are in the midst of a storm. With the disciples, we likely have cried out in fear and frustration—more than once—“Do you not care that we are perishing!” Do you not care that we are exhausted from isolation and anxiety? Do you not care that communities are being ravaged by injustice and inequity? Do you not care that there's an imbalance of power that feeds privilege and preferential treatment to some while keeping others dependent and disadvantaged? Do you not care that a global

pandemic continues to restrict the community and connection that gives us life? Do you not care that we are perishing?

When the disciples cry out in fear and desperation, Jesus wakes up and responds to their cries. He rebukes the wind, which is the same action he takes when casting out demons and disease in other parts of the gospel. Jesus responds to the fear of the disciples and he rebukes—he casts out—the storm. When he says “Be still,” I imagine that perhaps the disciples are taken to the words of Psalm 46—Be still...and know that I am God.

This story affirms that in the midst of the perils and struggles of a storm, when the journey to the next place is still in process and feels unending, the authority of the crucified and risen Christ is with us. Be still...and know that I am God. In Jesus—the resurrected Christ—God is with us. We are not alone in this storm (Sharon Ringe, Wesley Theological Seminary, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)).

Into those cries of desperation, the voice of Christ speaks...Peace. Be still. Do not be afraid. The wind of the Holy Spirit that blows over the Church in Pentecost is powerful enough to calm the storms, and the very real presence of the risen Christ stays with us in this boat, reminding us that we are not alone and that this invitation to go to another side comes from the One who accompanies us and encounters us along the journey.

As we see and feel the raging storms around us and within us, we cry out in desperation—sometimes our own desperation, sometimes on behalf of others—and in that crying out, we activate, participate in and witness hope and restoration in new ways. In this story we find a metaphor for the life of discipleship—responding to the invitation of Jesus to allow the Holy Spirit to move the church to another side, to stay on this journey of faith as

it takes us into new territory, and to continue to be attentive to the mysterious ways the reign of God is revealed in our communities.

As we continue to live through this pandemic, we find ourselves caught up in the wind and waves of disruption and change. But Jesus is with us in this boat as we follow the call of discipleship into mission and ministry in new ways. Jesus is with us in this boat as we tirelessly and faithfully find new ways of staying connected and strengthening community. Jesus is with us in this boat as we continue to care for and lift up the needs of those around us. Jesus is with us in this boat as we face the pain and realities of our history and privilege, as we repent of our role in systems of oppression, and as we continue to work for reconciliation with those whom we have harmed.

As much as we may wish this journey would be smooth and without struggle, the reality is that we find ourselves in a storm. In fact, as we respond to the invitation to follow Christ deeper into the world around us, we discover that crossing to another side with Jesus tends to be risky, and often leads us into some unpredictable situations where we are faced with our deep fears and concerns. We may find that following Jesus often takes us into encounters of pain and suffering in the world.

And it is into these experiences where Jesus' powerful words of peace and healing are most needed. At the end of this story, the disciples are not sure exactly who this Jesus is. They still have questions. Their faith still needs some strengthening, and they have moments where they still don't get it. But Jesus continues to invite them into relationship with him and participation in God's mission.

Jesus continues to have conversations with them, continues to answer their questions, and continues to try to find new ways to demonstrate who he is and what he is about. He continues to call

them to faithfully follow him. These moments where fear and faith collide become epiphany moments, where the light and revelation of God is made real in new ways. And so it is with us.

The promises poured over us in the waters of baptism are more powerful than the waves of chaos, disruption and struggle we experience throughout life. Strengthened and sustained by these promises, we navigate individual and community storms as we seek to make our way to the other side—as we seek to follow this call of discipleship. When the storms become just a bit stronger than we can handle on our own, we find comfort in the reminder that the resurrected Christ is still in the boat with us.

The resurrection is not just a one-time thing, but a reality that folds into daily life. When our fear becomes stronger than our faith, we cry out to the One who has power and authority over the wind and the waves. And when our questions consume us and keep us from seeing a way forward, we hear once again the voice of God casting out our fear, speaking into the storm with a word of peace, and inviting us to stay close in relationship.

The kingdom of God is like a group of people who seek to follow Jesus, even when they don't always know what that means. As they face the storms of life—individually and on behalf of others—they discover over and over that the One who has authority over the wind and the waves is the one who calls them, who invites them to cross over to the other side, who stays with them in the midst of the storm, and who faithfully speaks words of peace and calm into their fears and doubts. Amen.