

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mark's story of Jesus calming the storm has its **challenges** for any preacher. Yet, we should think more of the **opportunities** facing us this morning. Challenges and opportunities.

Our opportunity is to look at this with the prayer that this story comes home and becomes more real to us, more alive. Look at this from the point of view of the disciples.

Like them, do we wonder, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him"?

Or instead, do we wonder, "How long will Father Jim go today?"

So, here we are...2,000 years later in the nuclear age of the 21st century. We have scientific answers and explanations for just about everything. Logic and rational thought rule. Our time and culture has more in common with Einstein or Darwin, than with Jesus and his disciples, and that largely impacts upon **how** we read and interpret scripture. By the very nature of who we are, we look at stories like this and pass them off as hallucinations, or magic, or early church PR.

Walking on water. Raising the dead. Stilling this storm. The outside world looks at us, with our "hocus pocus" view and thinks that we are nuts, or all cultists, or both. And, I say....who could blame them?? That is...**IF** the actual stilling of the storm was the real focus of this story. **That** is the challenge we all have with this story. Getting by the modernist urge to read it through the common lens of rational thought, and then just throw it away as fantasy.

It is no different with this morning's Old Testament reading about David and Goliath. A boy slays the greatest warrior with a sling shot stone. Talk about a fantasy! I would like those odds at the casino!

So, what do we do with these stories? What opportunities are there? We can definitely relate to the disciples...in the boat, on churning waters. Even though storms on water were commonplace, they seemed to expect that they would be protected. Why? Jesus was with them.

But they seemed to be shocked that they were in this position. After all, would not God protect his Messiah and therefore protect his followers? How could this happen? We often do that as well. We have the same feeling of shock when some storm comes into our lives. Did not I do all the right things? I thought God is supposed to watch out for his own? How can this be happening to me? We are in the middle of a crisis and it seems like God is off somewhere taking a nap. You can almost hear him snoring.

The problem for the disciples was that Jesus **WAS** practically snoring. This is the only place in scripture that we read of Jesus sleeping, which is strange because of the storm. They wondered

how he could sleep through the storm, and when they were in danger.

They expected him to be attentive to their needs even in his sleep, and saw it as a lack of caring. We have all been there, haven't we? In the middle of a crisis and, again, it seems like God does not seem very responsive to our need. At least, we know that we are in that same boat, pun not intended.

When Jesus awakes, he calms the storm, and **then** he rebukes his disciples in asking them, "Why are you so afraid?", and "Do you still have no faith? You might expect that Jesus would be more compassionate here. In response to the question, "Why so afraid?", a disciple might say, "Oh, I don't know. Maybe it was the raging storm, the violent rocking of the boat, the water swamping the boat so that it was sinking. Maybe it was that we were about to drown. Just stuff like that. Don't you think we had a right to be anxious?"

Jesus was hoping that they would see the opportunities, and not just the challenges...just like for us this morning. Jesus hoped that what they had seen him do in the past would provide a stronger faith in the future. That was not the case. In fact, the story ends with his friends commenting about Jesus something like, "Who was that masked man!?" or, more accurately, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The stilling of the storm helps show the mysterious power of Jesus, but also how clueless were those closest to him. Here, we see how it is possible that many, many of the hearers of the word could prove unfruitful, as well as the crucial fact that the insiders often do not "get it" any clearer than the outsiders.

Author Mary Ann Tolbert suggests that the Parable of the Sower, in laying out the different kinds of soil, is a summary of the characters we meet in Mark's gospel. The rocky soil are those who "when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately they fall away". The rocky soil is the disciples in Mark's gospel and, immediately after these parables, they begin to show their true colors by showing fear in the face of a storm. Ultimately, they will go with their fear and fall away.

And **that** is the window of our opportunity today with this message. In Mark's gospel, the opposite of Faith is **not** doubt or disbelief...but rather fear. In life...STUFF HAPPENS. We ALL have problems...stormy relationships, personal money issues, health concerns for ourselves and/or loved ones, you name it.

Storms of all types and intensities. And it hits all of us...including the most devout and righteous. But it does NOT mean that God does not love me, or is angry with you, or is paying us back for something. It is not a cosmic game, as God does not toy with us. But many times it is just that Stuff Happens, and trying to analyze what happened or assign blame is a fruitless activity. We live in a fallen world, and the important thing is whether or not we are prepared for them.

The real story here today is not that the storm is stilled, but rather that Jesus wakes up and asks the question, "Do you still have no faith?" That is it. These guys were shaking in the boat, waiting around for Jesus to wake up and help them. They were bystanders, not direct participants. Like some kind of groupies, they hung around...waiting to watch the show of life through Jesus. But Jesus, for his part, was trying to teach them..and us...that we can do it for ourselves. He wanted to teach them that he was no different from them, or from you and me.

Being prepared for life, by growing in faith..and faithfulness with God. **That** is a key to this passage. In the boat, they do not get it at all...not yet. But **we** should get it. Through personal lives in transition, we should know the blessing of a peace from God which grows through faith.

Faith is a prevailing calmness that remains unshakable, all in the face of potential disaster and trouble and distress, that calls us to give thanks for all aspects of our lives. In having a sharper focus, a crisper hearing, a keener awareness toward all events, all encounters in our day, and in our world...helping us to retain the dignity within our humanity. That part of the divine that lives within each of us as baptized persons within the body of Christ....keeping on top that part which made us in the very image of God, if you will. In this way, it may be only in the storm that we truly understand who Jesus is. We keep meeting Jesus in new ways...sometimes in crisis.

This message is an extension of last week...the kingdom of God arises, by faith, from something as small as a seed. As we live with all the brokenness of this world, we need to learn from Jesus in that sinking boat....leave it to God.

We call out to God for peace, for comfort. And God's answer, God's only answer, is "I am in the midst of you. Yes, I am here. I am with you always", in all of the ways and encounters known to us as personified in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.