

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 7, Year B  
2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Psalm 9:9-20, Mark 4:35-41

The Rev. Charlie Bauer  
Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, VA  
June 20, 2021

I'm not much of a sailor. I've taken a handful of lessons over the years, and I know just enough about nautical charts to get myself in some real trouble, but I have never been anything close to a competent sailor. I've lived close enough to water of one kind or another my entire life, so even in my lack of competency, I have always felt comfortable being on the water.

Some years ago, I found myself on a small passenger ferry, heading out to an island for a tour. The journey out was unremarkable, and my friends and I stayed inside on the main deck, watching the views of the harbor pass by in relative comfort. We made it to the island, did our tour, and then found ourselves realizing we needed to rush back to the dock to catch one ferry before it departed – or we would be stranded on the dock for a while until the next one arrived.

Being among the last ones to board, we had two options: crowd inside, or climb up to a small upper deck and face the elements. Well, this was my preferred way to do it, anyway, and the weather seemed calm enough, so without much convincing, up we climbed and took our seats around a small, short metal railing.

What had seemed to be an easy, smooth ride inside on the main deck on the way out to the island, was anything but calm on the way back. The wind picked up and shifted directions, and despite the continued sunny weather, we simply plowed into wave after wave. I found myself clinging to the thin metal of the railing as I rocked, and at times became airborne on particularly heavy waves, wondering how well I would be spotted if I simply flew off and landed in the water behind the ferry.

And, I found myself praying for Jesus to do just what he did for his disciples in this morning's gospel text: Jesus, rebuke the wind and call out to the waters, "Peace! Be still!"<sup>1</sup> Of course, Jesus does so at the wishes of his disciples, yet you may have noticed they don't exactly come out of this story looking great. As a reminder of Jesus' immense patience as much as his love for his followers, his response after calming the waters around them is a pointed rebuke:

"Why are you afraid?  
Have you *still* no faith?"<sup>2</sup>

Like a parent reminding a toddler for the hundredth time to clean up her toys – not a real example from my life – Jesus asks with an equal mix of astonishment and kindness why his disciples, after all they had witnessed, all of the healings and miracles and prayers – what *more* must Jesus do for them to put their lives completely in God's hands?

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:39b NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 4:40.

We would be forgiven, then, for thinking of this trip across the Sea of Galilee as another bump in the road of the disciples' journey with Jesus. We could think of the storm and the terror of the disciples in similar terms to my own ferry ride, a singular event in our lives, and our prayer is for Jesus to come save us from that moment of peril.

But that leads us down a dangerous path. If we think of God as sometimes choosing to calm the storms in our lives, and sometimes, well, not – then when Jesus does *not* seem to come into our lives and save the day, God must disapprove of us, or worse yet, be absent altogether. This is akin to us saying that God never gives us anything we cannot handle, which leads to us either struggling to cope when something bad happens, or feeling the extra burden of God's absence when we find we cannot deal with our troubles on our own.

But then, if our story today is not about Jesus intervening in a singular moment, what is this storm that Jesus calms for his disciples – and for us?

We might view the Gospel of Mark as an apocalyptic text.<sup>3</sup> Besides telling us the story of Jesus' earthly ministry, those moments in history from baptism to crucifixion and resurrection, the author of Mark is trying to prepare us for what happens to us in the life to come. Though Jesus is never truly absent from us, we do not physically see Jesus in the way that the disciples did, as if he were for us too asleep in the boat while the rest of us find ourselves tending to the great gale around us.

Jesus awakes to guide his disciples – and us – out of death and into life.

In this less literal reading of our passage today, we need not look at Jesus calming the storm out of jealousy, wishing that God would similarly appear to us and rid us of whatever ails us or weighs us down in any given moment, much as we might like for that to happen.<sup>4</sup>

Rather, we can read this story with great joy: when it comes to our ultimate time of trial, Jesus promises to be there alongside us, calming the waters so we may safely enter that heavenly kingdom where there is peril no more.

Our call to us is clear. When our instinct is to call out to Jesus in those particular moments of trouble, those storms in our lives when we face acute danger, Jesus calls back out to *us* to place our lives ever in God's loving hands. Jesus rebukes his disciples because they've missed the greater point, that the miracles Jesus shows us are not mere moments but evidence of a greater power.

Turn, time and again, to the loving power of Jesus. Whether you find yourself boarding a ferry on a windy afternoon, or facing a difficult diagnosis, or sitting in church on a Sunday morning, or just going about your everyday life, the lesson is the same: put your complete, wholehearted trust in Jesus, always, and God will not abandon us, but will guide us ever closer to God's calming presence.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a longer discussion of Mark as an apocalyptic text, see:

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-5>.

<sup>4</sup> We are equally cautioned against placing limits around God's actions in the world; though Jesus may not calm every storm around us, that should not stop us from intercessory prayer or witnessing God's loving presence and guidance in the world about us.