

Pentecost 5B (6/24/2018)

Job 38:1-11

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

**Mark 4:35-41**

*God's words are efficacious. Divine words have the power to make peace, both in the hearts of individual people of faith and in the chaotic circumstances of our common life. Wherever the word of Christ is proclaimed, there is God's transformative influence. So, what divine words bring you peace that passes understanding?*

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

The disciples' panicked question in our Gospel from Mark today is a perennial cry of faith. **When life tosses you to and fro, threatening to overwhelm you like a storm at sea, do you ever wonder if God is sleeping through it all?** Do you ever wonder if God is detached from your distress and unresponsive to the world's needs?

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

**Sometimes it's a deeply personal cry from a place of pain and loneliness,** the cry of one who is collapsing under the weight of grief or anxiety or depression. This kind of lament is not new, as if people of faith in previous generations were immune to desperation and doubt. The psalmist is well known for just this sort of prayer: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 13:1-2.

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

**Sometimes it’s a cry of collective exasperation at the stubbornness of the world’s injustice and hostility.** And again, the sentiment is longstanding. The Hebrew prophet, usually so certain of God’s justice, himself pleads, “O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ...The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”<sup>2</sup>

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Jesus’ response is evocative. Before replying to the disciples, he turns to the storm itself and quells it with a simple command: “Peace. Be still.” One little word subdues the chaos of the sea. Language is powerful, isn’t it? Speaking from the boat with such authority, Jesus associates himself with the God who, in the beginning, speaks all of creation, to include the roaring seas, into existence. The same God speaks truth to kings through the words of the Hebrew prophets, censuring the powerful for their abuses and reminding them of their responsibility to defend the most vulnerable in their midst. God speaks healing and abundant life through the words of Jesus, the Word made flesh, that the poor might receive the good news of God’s reign come near. Finally, God speaks hope through our own proclamation of the good news,

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<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk 1:2-4.

words that confront the death-dealing ways of the world with the conviction that the cross will not have the final say.

**We have a God of words, and God's words are efficacious.** It's easy to let our Bibles gather dust on the shelf of history, treating Holy Scripture as if it were hopelessly outdated and disconnected from the realities of contemporary life. But, **God's word is living and active, ringing out even today from the ancient story to redeem us and sustain us for lives of faith and love.** Luther puts it this way: the proclamation of the word is *Deus loquens*, "God speaking," even to us who hear it so many centuries after it was first recorded. He explains:

For God has said, "When the Word of Christ is preached, I am in your mouth, and I go with the Word through your ears and into your heart." Therefore, we have a sure sign and sure knowledge that when the gospel is proclaimed, God is present there.<sup>3</sup>

**Where do you hear the hope of the gospel ring out most clearly? Which passages speak the Teacher's word of peace to you most powerfully?** In the wake of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain's suicides earlier this month, a pastor asked other pastors in an online forum to name the biblical texts that have been especially helpful to them in the depth of their own crises. One answered that the psalms of lament give her permission to cry out to God in despair when she needs to, just as Jesus cried out from the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.thirstytheologian.com/2013/07/23/god\\_speaking.php](http://www.thirstytheologian.com/2013/07/23/god_speaking.php), citing Stephen J. Lawson, *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther*.

cross.<sup>4</sup> Another mentioned that he consistently returns to Jesus' promise in the Gospel of John: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly."<sup>5</sup> Still another quoted the famous words of Christian hope at the end of Romans chapter eight:

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>6</sup>

**The prevailing wisdom is that talk is cheap. But, divine words have the power to make peace, real peace, both in the hearts of individual people of faith and in the chaotic circumstances of our common life. Wherever the word of Christ is proclaimed, there is God's transformative influence.**

Dear church, my invitation to you is to listen closely for those words that transform you – biblical images and poetry that make your heart sing, stories and parables that shape your moral imagination, promises that instill peace that passes understanding. Listen closely for those words and cling to them always, and especially in those times when it seems that you are on the verge of perishing.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 15:34.

<sup>5</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:38-39.