



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

The Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

Service of Healing and Wholeness, October 16, 2019

Gospel Text: Mark 4:1-8

Just because we know that storms are going to happen sometimes, doesn't prepare us fully for when they do show up. Lots of us know moments for ourselves and others that arise and cause turbulence and distress, but when a big storm hits, it usually takes us by surprise and hits hard.

Like it did for Travis and Ashley, who had weathered Ashley losing her job because their employer would not allow them to both work there when they became a couple, which led to financial instability amidst the ups and downs of daily life. But the storm kicked up when Travis got an end-stage disease diagnosis. It blindsided them completely and wave after wave tossed over them- the appointments, the results, the lifestyle changes, the medications. The, he found himself in the hospital with devastating news-it looked like the storm of the disease was going to prevail. The nurse called for a chaplain, as Travis and Ashley, just like the disciples were in a tiny boat tossed by a violent storm, crying out, "Lord, can't you see? We're perishing here!" Just like those disciples, they longed for divine intervention while Jesus is seemingly sleeping.

If you take a look at the art on our bulletin cover, it captures this well.



Rembrandt's famous painting of "Jesus in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee," captures the wide array of responses. On the left, some are trying desperately to hold on to the sail to keep the boat from spinning, or onto the mast to keep from flying overboard.

At the top you can see that one of the riggings has come untethered and flaps in the wind. The water is bursting in and the spray is flying as some try to shield themselves. The man at the rudder is engaged in a futile struggle to control the boat. One man is getting sick over the side, and right in the center at the base of the mast, is a man whose back is to us. He is just sitting there, perhaps resigned to whatever is coming and preparing for the end. And a couple are pleading frantically with Jesus. We're drawn to the actions depicted in bright light in this painting. I think quite intentionally, we have to train our eye to look for Jesus. You have to look hard to find Jesus, on the other side, barely seen. In all of the emotions we experience when we are in stormy times, it can be hard to see Jesus.

In the hospital room where the chaplain showed up, now there were three people in a tiny boat tossing and heaving as they processed the news. Travis was thinking back as his life flashed before his eye, and he was "fixin' to die" and hoping God would receive him on the other side, after all he'd done. Ashley, wanted a miracle, a cure that surely a super powerful prayer to an Almighty God could bring. The chaplain offered to pray, but what kind of prayer could encompass both desires?

What they shared in common, despite that huge gap, was that they wanted the storm to stop! And the prayer called them together around what they fervently wanted even more- to believe even when you can't see it, that Jesus is Lord, with the power to make the storm be still!

The first thing Jesus does in the gospel, is to bring calm, before any conversation about faith. Because Jesus knows, we can't take that lesson in, in the state we're in. "Lord, don't you care?!" is a prayer. "When the sleeping savior stirs in response to his disciples' cries, he doesn't tell them to have no fear. He instead invites them to examine why they are afraid—in essence, to consider how and why they have let the windstorm rule their reality—(then) calls upon them to have a measure of faith that will accompany them amid their fears and help to restore their vision." (Jan Richardson)

In the hospital room the chaplain took the first step in faith, by praying, "Lord, you know where we are..." a brutally honest start. "Lord, help us know you are here." It was the start of remembering Jesus is right here, and trusting whatever it takes to get to the other side, whatever that means for us, Jesus will bring it."

In that prayer came stillness, a form of healing. A blessed peace. And even though when eyes opened again, there was still a diagnosis, and even though the journey had much to go, God's peace and healing had come. Travis and Ashley remembered they were not alone and they began to try to look for Jesus first.

And every time they were in the hospital again, they somehow always managed to cross paths with the chaplain. Probably because God wanted it that way so that they could keep the faith, by trusting Jesus. Just like God had used that nurse who called the chaplain the first time they needed to remember that Jesus was in their boat.

**In times of tumult, our natural reaction is to wonder whether or not there is a God, or if God is aware of my problem and need for healing. How might God be inviting you to shift your attention in a way that helps you recognize that the storm does not have the final word? To refocus your vision?**

**We gather to tell these stories and to point one another to Jesus- the ruler of the universe and history, and God very much present in our anxieties and dis-ease, here now. Always concerned for us even when we don't perceive God's care and presence.**

**So let us pray:**

**Lord, help us to see you, help us to point one another to you, and help us to rest in the healing and comfort you bring in all our storms in faith that you will bring us to the other side.**

**AMEN**