

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 7—Year B
I Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49
Psalm 9:9-20
II Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

What a week! What a tumultuous week! **Boats** of conscience are being rocked pretty furiously. **Waves are breaking over the bow**, and it feels like we are being **swamped**. The NRSV translation doesn't do justice to the **storm** that has blown up in **Mark 4**. A **great windstorm** certainly feels big, but it doesn't capture **the violence of the wind**. No, the Greek goes to painstaking lengths to paint the picture—this is a **whirlwind**, a **tempestuous wind**, a **violent attack of wind**, a **squall**. Listen to this description: *never a single gust nor a steady blowing wind, however violent, but a storm breaking forth from black thunder clouds in furious gusts, with floods of rain, and throwing everything topsy-turvy*. That's how the *zero-tolerance policy that led to family separation on the southern border struck the conscience*. The **outcry** crossed party lines and faith traditions. By midweek *family separation* was rescinded. We still don't know *how these children and parents previously separated will be reunited*, and now, there will be a shift to *family detention*. While *keeping parents and children together* is certainly *better*, this has *impacts and consequences* that we can't begin to see.

Everything I have learned over the last year about **ACE's**, **Adverse Childhood Experiences**, and the **trauma** such experiences creates, and the impact of **trauma** on **brain development** in children—everything I have learned tells me that this situation is **a sea of raging trauma**, *for everyone*—for **children who don't know where their parents are**, for **parents who don't know where their children are**, for those **living in detention centers that look and feel like prisons** and are **run by for-profit companies**, and **trauma** for all **those who have to administer these policies**. I heard a story of a *flight attendant*, who was tending to some of these children being flown to other facilities across the country, His voice broke when he spoke of how the faces of these children, tear-streaked and stony-faced and silent, were imprinted on his mind's eye. We're just not made for this as human beings.

It hurts our hearts to see these images and hear these stories, and *we dare not look away*. As **Eucharistic Prayer C** reminds us, **we dare not come to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal**. Yes, we come to church for *peace* and *sanctuary* and to *get our tank filled*, but we *don't* get to come here and *escape the pain of the world*; we come here to be **shaped like Christ, to be made into his likeness, and to strengthened to stand where he stands, and that will always take us to the cross and into places of crucifixion and into the heart of human suffering**.

But leaning into that pain, oh my goodness, it can **swamp** us, and we can feel like we are **sinking**. Okay, **Jesus is in the boat with us, but he's asleep, and he doesn't seem to much care that we are being destroyed by this**. And frankly, **Mark** reminds us that **it's okay to cry out to him, "Don't you care that we're perishing?"** It's okay to **raise our voice** and **give him a nudge to wake him up**. *He has power over this storm. He can silence; he can still—in the Greek, literally muzzle—these violent, tempestuous forces that have been unleashed*. And when he does, it goes as **still** and **calm** as you can imagine. **Those stormy seas became like**

glass. And you know what happens when **the water becomes like glass**? *All you can see is your own reflection, and we have to look at ourselves.* And then, you know what comes next? **He turns to all of us in this boat and says, “Why are you so afraid? Why are you so timid and fearful? Have you still no faith? Do you lack conviction? Do you not trust still?”**

These **moral storms** that are raging around us, this **collision of political wills and false choices**, these **endless wars of words and maneuvering for political advantage to be leveraged for the next election *by both sides***, while **the most vulnerable in our human family are suffering**, these **waves of heart-wrenching images breaking over the sides of our little boats**—we can easily feel **swamped by despair and powerlessness**. And yet, and yet, **if we will stay in the boat, and stay present to this storm**, it holds the *potential to break our heart*, and the **psalmist** knows that **a broken and contrite heart is one that God can work with and make new.**

But we have to find our center amidst the storm before we will know what to do with the dead calm that Jesus will bring, because frankly, the dead calm is just as unnerving as the storm.

So, a few reminders here. **Caring for the alien among us is a command from God** going back to **Israel’s wilderness days and those early days in the promised land.** **Leviticus 19:34: The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the *citizen* among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.**

Jesus picks this up in Matthew 25. He’s teaching about what will happen when **the Son of Man comes in his glory and how all the *nations* will be gathered before him and how he’ll separate people.** And the criteria the **Son of Man** will use to **separate people** is as follows: **How did you treat the least of these? And the least of these are further defined this way: Did you feed the hungry? Did you give the thirsty something to drink? Did you welcome the *stranger, the xenos, the foreigner*? Did you give the naked clothing? Did you take care of the sick? Did you visit those in *prison*? And did you understand that as you *did* OR *did not do* these things to the least of these who are *members of my family, you did them to me*? It’s a blistering teaching, and a blistering judgment, not just on us as *individuals*, but on **our collective action OR inaction as a nation**, especially with regards to how those **actions OR inactions impact the most vulnerable.****

And if we think God doesn’t care about what’s going on today, the **psalmist** would remind us that we are sorely mistaken. Listen again to some of the verses we heard this morning from **psalm 9.**

The LORD will be a refuge for the oppressed, *
a refuge in time of trouble...

He will not forget the cry of the afflicted...

The ungodly have fallen into the pit they dug, *
and in the snare they set is their own foot caught.

Stop. The word translated as “**ungodly**” is actually “**nations**” in Hebrew.

The [nations] have fallen into the pit they dug, *
and in the snare they set is their own foot caught.

The LORD is known by his acts of justice; *
the wicked—here defined as *those who act wickedly in ethics and religion*—**the wicked are trapped in the works of their own hands.**
The wicked shall be given over to the grave, *
and also all the peoples that forget God.

Again, the word translated as “peoples” is really “nations.”

So, the wicked shall be given over to the grave, *
and also all the [nations] that forget God.
For the needy shall not always be forgotten, *
and the hope of the poor shall not perish for ever
Rise up, O LORD, let not the [nations] have the upper hand; *
let them be judged before you.
Put fear upon them, O LORD; *
let the [nations] know they are but mortal.

We pray portions of *this psalm every day* in Morning and Evening Prayer! God cares about the oppressed, the afflicted, the poor, the needy, and God cares about what is happening at the hands of the *nations*. We are *citizens* of a particular nation, yes, but we are *citizens* of the kingdom of God *before* all other allegiances. And just as the Son of Man will judge the *nations* on their treatment of the least of these who are members of his body, so too must we. As members of the body of Christ who are inextricably bound to the least of these, we must raise our voices when our *nation* is using its power to afflict the most vulnerable of the human family. This is *not a partisan issue*; this is a *humanity issue*.

We know the issues of immigration are complex, and part of the complexity is getting painfully honest about how the actions of our nation have contributed to the unravelling of nations south of our border. *This isn't their problem alone; it's our problem together.*

God calls us into radical solidarity with the oppressed and afflicted, the needy and poor and forgotten, and that means using some *radical imagination* to step into their shoes. What pain, what suffering, what violence, what hopelessness must there be to compel you to leave your culture and your homeland and your extended family and the life you'd dreamed of to make this dangerous trek north?

Are there some *bad actors gaming the system, exploiting children* to get across? I'm sure there are, and *they should be prosecuted*, but even there, we need to go deeper and ask, what hopelessness compels them to come?

The immigrant men and women that I've met *in our local community*, they want to be safe, and they want to work, and they work hard and save, so that they can send money back to support their extended families in their home countries—that's the very definition of *personal responsibility*.

And those who bring their families, these parents are doing whatever it takes to get to a better life for their children. Until you are in that position, you don't know the lengths you'll go to for the welfare of your child, and until we've had to walk in those shoes, we sure don't get to judge it, except to ask ourselves, "What are we doing OR not doing to the least of these who are members of Jesus' family?"

And one more step in our imagination. There was a young family about 2,000 years ago. The father got wind that the brutal dictator of that region was in a murderous rage; that king felt threatened by the presence of that father's infant son; that brutal dictator was killing all the boys in that region under the age of 2, killing them indiscriminately; the violence was horrific. God told that father in a dream, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt." They left everything behind, in the middle of the night they fled.

What would have happened if at the border of Egypt, the guard had stepped across and questioned the legitimacy of their request for asylum? What would have happened if that infant son had been separated from his mother and father, sent who knows where, while the mother and father awaited deportation proceedings? What would have happened to this family if they had been detained together, and then deported together back to the land of indiscriminate violence where brutality reigned?

This is the story of our Lord, and his mother Mary, and his father Joseph. How do we not get this? Where is Jesus right now? In the crying children. Where is Mary? In the grief-stricken and panicked mothers. Where is Joseph? Trying his best to do right by his family.

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Our first lesson today tells that old story of David going up against Goliath. There is one detail I had never noticed before, and that's the sheer weight of all the armor that Goliath is wearing—a helmet of bronze, a coat of mail weighing five thousand shekels of bronze, greaves of bronze on his legs, a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders, a spear with a shaft as big as a weaver's beam with a head that weighed six hundred shekels of iron. David tries to wear Saul's coat of mail, and the bronze helmet, and to take Saul's sword, but he can't walk for the weight of it all.

Finally, David takes the armor off and goes forth into battle with only his shepherd's staff, his shepherd's pouch, five smooth stones, and a slingshot. And we know how this story ends, that one smooth stone, well-placed on Goliath's forehead, brought down the giant.

When are we going to take off our armor of fear and scarcity that tells us we cannot care for the least of these who are coming to us crying for our help?

What simple stones is God asking us to pick up and use as we go up against these giant forces that say we must fear the alien instead of welcoming them?

What armor do we have to shed to step forward into this battle? The armor of inertia? The armor of despair? The armor of cynicism? The armor of tribal identity that can't receive ideas and solutions that come from across the aisle? The armor of powerlessness?

What armor is God asking us to shed so that we can pick up our shepherd's crook and tend these sheep and feed these lambs as Jesus has commanded his church to do?

Paul leaves the **Corinthians** with these words today: **We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.**

Today, **God** is **calling** to us to **open wide *our* hearts also. Take off your armor. Let this pain and suffering break your heart open, so that you can open it even wider still. Cry out to Jesus to calm this violent tempestuous storm** that is raging, but then, *go the next hard step*—in the **still, still waters**, in that **dead calm** that follows, **lean over the side of the boat and gaze into that mirror.**

Let **Jesus** **break open your heart *further* still** with his question, **“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith, no trust, no conviction?”** **Shed the armor of your paralyzing fear, take on the giants that have forgotten the needy, be hope, *in the flesh*, for the poor. Take off the armor and lead with your open heart, with conviction, fiercely trusting that nothing is impossible with God. Amen.**

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