

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 7—Year B
Job 38:1-11
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
II Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

Whew! Everywhere we turn today, there is a **storm** brewing.

The Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind and gives him a good talking to—*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”*

The **psalmist** talks about those who **went down to the sea in ships and plied their trade in deep waters** and how **the Lord spoke**, and a **stormy wind arose**, which **tossed high the waves of the sea**. **“Those waves mounted up to the heavens and fell back to the depths; and their hearts melted because of their peril. They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits end...”**

And then in **Mark’s gospel** we hear this: **When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side.”** And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them **in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”**

Stormy seas are everywhere, and my goodness, don’t we know it! **COVID**, and all that attends to it, has **tossed us about** for 16 months. **All the ills that have infected our society and communities—racism, the climate crisis, political division, gun violence—all of these have these have beat our boats until we are weary.** Amidst all of this **division and conflict**, there are **the winds that knock us down** when we are doing our well-intentioned best to **cross over to the other side.**

And then there are the **personal storms that blow up unexpectedly** and that **toss us high and drop us low** and **melt our hearts**, that **put us at our wits end** and **threaten to swamp us altogether--an injury or diagnosis** in ourselves or someone we love, **a loss** that takes our breath away, **a change of direction** that is disorienting, **a personal reckoning with our shadow**, some storms are known by others and some are hidden deep in the depths of our hearts invisible to the world around us—any number of things can **blow up unexpectedly and swamp us.**

And when the **winds are raging**, and the **waves are beating your boat**, and it’s the **middle of the night and dark**, and **your boat is filling up**, and you feel like **Jesus is asleep on the job leaving you to utterly alone in facing this storm**, it’s easy to question if **God’s really as loving and caring and alert to you as our faith would profess.** You can feel the **frustration brewing as the your boat is sinking** and you’re **looking back to Jesus stretched out on the cushion in the stern taking a snooze.** It’s not hard to **picture ourselves joining in with the disciples, shaking him awake, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are being destroyed here???”**

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Hush! Be still!” Like Jesus put a muzzle on the wind. Then the wind grew weary and it ceased its raging, and there was a great, massive calm, *just as great and massive as the storm that raged in the first place*. Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Why are you fearful and timid? Have you still no faith? Have you still no trust?”

This is just a huge leap of faith for us because what *this story* tells us is that the winds of life are going to blow up out of the blue *and* storms will rage *and* we will get swamped *and* having Jesus in the boat with us won’t keep any of these things from happening to us. *And yet*, we *also* hear clearly that Jesus has the power to make the storm cease.

Our passage from Job *indicates the same* as the Lord continues to pin Job’s ears back: Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?—when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’” *The Lord is clearly in charge here*.

And the psalmist *indicates the same*: Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper and quieted the waves of the sea. Then were they glad because of the calm, and he brought them to the harbor they were bound for. *God clearly can still the storm and quiet the waves*.

It’s so hard to reconcile God’s power to still the storm and stop the waves *with the reality* that life is still going to knock us flat. God’s power didn’t keep devastating loss from happening to Job—the loss of livelihood, the loss of home, the loss of family, the loss of friends, the loss of health—all these things still laid him out.

And yet, there is something here *that is essential* for us to grasp. For all of Job’s shaking his fist at God, for all of Job’s protest and “Why me, God?” *in the end*, *those answers* would not be provided, *but what God offered instead* was an immediate, intimate, mind-blowing encounter with the Holy One who laid the foundation of the earth. *In the end*, Job was invited into relationship with God who sets the bounds to the sea. Devastation still comes, and we are embraced by Presence in the midst of it all.

And Jesus is asking us to trust, not that the storms will stop, *but that in the midst of the storm, even if it looks like he’s asleep on the job*, he is present to us, and he can still the storm, *maybe not always in the external events if we’re being realistic*, but he can absolutely still the storm *within* us, and bring us to that place of calm that is *equal to, or even greater than*, the storm that is raging around us. Truth be told, when we’re being swamped, *it’s that internal calm we need as much as we need the external winds to cease*. *If we can find that calm, we can meet whatever waves we’re given to ride*.

And the psalmist reminds us that, *in the end*, God is going to bring us to the harbor we’re bound for. *Navigating the storms on the open sea is not our new normal, not our final destination; resting in the harbor that we’re bound for—resting in the heart of God, held in*

God's embrace and love free of fear—that's where we're bound and where God will bring us when it's all said and done. And *this* is what Jesus is asking us to trust; we can count on this.

Let's be honest, **none of this makes the storms any less nerve-wracking or challenging; none of this makes life's journey less painful when your boat is getting beat, *but it does give us a way to lean into hope that is fierce and steely and steadfast, the kind of hope that is up to the task of the challenges that life throws our ways.*** We can have a fairy-tale faith that would claim that if you just believe enough nothing bad will ever happen to you, **OR** we can have a faith and trust that God can bring us to calm in the midst of a raging storm. *I'll take the second kind of faith any day because it is real and up to the task of the life most of us experience.* The storms will come, and calm in the midst of them is the promise that will sustain us if we just trust that *this is enough* to see us to the other side. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC
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