Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper7—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

This story from **Mark's gospel** is the very first bible story I remember falling in love with. My parents had given me this *Good News Bible* and it had the **words of Jesus in red** and **line drawings**. I *loved* the line drawings, and I **LOVED the line drawing that came with *this* story**. It showed a **boat being tossed about in the waves**, and it said, **"Jesus calms a storm."** Even as a kid, I *loved* that.

I am a **water person**. Grew up on **Harrods Creek** which is **way, way bigger that most rivers around here**. My **family had**, and **still has, a marina**—**Creekside Landing Marina**—and we **dock about 50 boats**, some as **big as 50-foot houseboats**. We **spent our summers on the Ohio River**, and **you learn early on to have a healthy respect for the water**, and **you always kept an eye to the sky**, **watching how the clouds are forming, noting whether trouble was brewing**.

And **I love storms**; I've always **been fascinated by them**. But *usually*, I'm **watching them from my family room, nice and dry and safe**. ***But when you are on the water, whew, that's a whole different deal.*** I've been **caught in more storms on the Ohio River than I can count**, been **caught up in a whirlpool in a 40-foot houseboat**, **not been able to get back up Harrods Creek because of the flash flood torrent running out**, and I have **watched the waves whip up from nowhere**. It's **so, so scary**, **so out of control**; you are **so small and so powerless**.

Can you feel that? Can you feel that adrenaline pumping?

Let that perk.

Jesus has been teaching the crowds. They've been **plowing through all kinds of parables**, trying to **describe the kingdom of God**. He's been talking about **sowing seeds**—both **intentionally and methodically** *and* with the **scatter technique**; he's been talking about **not putting lamps under bushels** and **mustard seeds**.

And now evening has come. So, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side. Let us take a journey to the other side." This is about **a journey from point A *across a space* moving to point B**—*you tracking me here?*

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was, *"with"* being the operative word here. The Greek is beautiful—**"they joined him to themselves."** This is about **having Jesus *companion* them**. **And other boats were with him.** *We don't go alone, ever*. **Lots of boats are making this journey**.

And the text tells us that a **great windstorm arose**, but that description doesn't do it justice. This is a ***megas*** event, like as in ***mega***—and in the Greek, it is **violent** and **mighty** and **strong**. And it's **not just any wind**, but this is a **whirlwind**, a **gale**, a **squall**. The Greek commentary is clear—***this***

is never a single gust nor a steady blowing wind, however violent, but this is a storm breaking forth from black clouds in furious gusts with floods of rain and throwing everything topsy-turvy. And just to make sure we get this, the Greek phrasing throws in **one more word for wind**; ***this*** **wind** is a **violent agitation** and **stream of air**.

Got a feel for this wind?

And it **came up from nowhere**. It **wasn't there when they started this journey, or they never would have left shore**. But it **came up *on the way across***, **in the *middle* of the journey**, and **in the evening**, no less. **Was it dark? Were they encountering this crazy, furious, throwing-everything-topsy-turvy wind when they couldn't see** and **had lost all their landmarks** and **orienting points-of-reference?** *Crossings are never easy in the best of conditions, but this was more than they bargained for.*

And the waves beat into the boat, so that boat was being swamped. That is no fun. And **where is** *their* **Teacher**, *their* **Leader**, *their* **Shepherd**, *their* **Guide**, *their* **Captain**? Well **he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion**. Seriously???

And **they did what any panicked crew** would do, they **woke him up** and said to him, **"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"** But again, that **sounds so British and stoic**. No, the **Greek is a little more raw…*"We are perishing; we are lost; we have been given over to the eternal misery of hell; we are ruined, destroyed…"***

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, chided it, reproved it, admonished it, *showed it honor*, ***showed it the respect it was due***. And **he said to the sea, "Peace, be silent! I'm going to muzzle you and reduce you to silence and keep you in check. Be calm, be still!"**

Then the wind died down; it **grew weary**; it **ceased from its violence**; it **ceased its raging**. And **just as great**, as ***megas***, **was that wind**, *so now* how **great**, how ***megas***, was **this calm**. This translation describes it as a **dead calm**; **it was perfectly, perfectly calm**. ***Water like glass***.

And **Jesus said to them, "Why are you afraid?"** And here it's a little different word than the one we usually see for **"afraid"—*this* afraid** is more like **timid, fearful**. ***"Why are you so timid, so fearful? Have you still no faith, no trust, no confidence?"***

And they were **filled with great awe**—root of this is **φοβέω**—it means **to be struck with fear**, but the **kind of fear** that is a hair's breadth from **reverence**. ***Mysterium tremendum et fascinans***, that term coined by **German theologian Rudolpf Otto**—***fearful and fascinating mystery***—the **kind of awe** that is **terrifying** because you know you are in the **presence of the Holy Mystery itself**.

"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him, harken to him, listen to him?" *Who indeed…*

So, we're **on a journey getting from point A *to* point B**. **Conditions are fine when we leave**, but **we're out there in the middle** and it's **evening** and **getting dark** and we've **lost our familiar**

landmarks, the **winds start to blow**, and **not just a little but *a lot***. And we **start getting blown all around**, and **there is a violence to it**. **Our smooth sailing** is **smooth no longer**, and it **makes us scared** and **maybe even a little motion sick**. Everything is **topsy-turvy**, and **we don't much like it**.

Your life ever feel that way? Can a community's life ever feel that way?

And **our fear sets in**, and it just **swamps us**, and we **feel utterly alone**. Our **fear may feel as big as Goliath**, that **Philistine giant from our I Samuel 17 passage earlier**. Oh, **Jesus is there**, but **he is asleep at the wheel**, or in this case, **in the stern on a daggone cushion**. *Not impressed **Jesus**, you don't even have a bailing bucket.*

And **in our lostness** and **disorientation**, it's **easy to lose our way**, **to think he really just doesn't care.** We **fear** that **whatever is blowing us around**, **swamping us**, **taking us down in the swirl**, we **fear that *that* wind is going to take us down**, and **we'll never find our way back again**.

But Jesus *knows*, Jesus *knows* the wind and the waves *aren't* what will drown us—it's our *fear*; **our *fear*** is **what can swamp us** and **sink is**. The **kind of fear** that **makes us timid**, **makes us small**, **makes us lose all of our confidence**, **makes us forget who we are** *and* **in whose image we are made**. And **neither that fear**, that **timidity**, **nor the wind that triggers it** are **a match** for **the calm that Jesus commands**, the **peace that he brings**, the **stillness that he is**. *His questions to us pierce the heart…**After all this time, why are you afraid, why are you so timid? Have you still not trust, no confidence?"***

After all this time, **walking the journey as those baptized into Christ's death and resurrection**, **after all this time moving through this world from point A *to* point B as the Body of Christ**, **why are we afraid, why would we *ever* be timid?** *After all this time*, **have we no trust in what he can do**, **have we no confidence in his power, or in ours?** ***After all, he did give us his Spirit.***

The wind and the sea, they obey him. They harken to him. They listen to him. *Do we?*

And **remember**, too, it's **not all the heavy armor**, all the **bells** and **whistles**, that **defeats Goliath**, but it's **David's naked vulnerability**, a **few stones**, and **his *trust* and *confidence***.

Back to Mark. **When Jesus awakes**, when **he rises**, **he commands peace and stillness** and **calm** and **those winds cease** and **that water becomes like glass**. And **when you look into water that is like glass**, **you see *perfectly* clear images looking back at you**, the **fullness of God gazing through your eyes catching your eye in return**. If **we can move into the dead calm**, the **perfect, perfect, still, calm**, we **touch what is truly awesome**, the **fullness of God permeating everything that is, us included**.

We need not fear *anything*, **not the crossing**, **not the journey**, **not the winds that will surely come out of nowhere**, **not the waves that will break over the bow**, **not the motion and movement** that **will make our stomachs churn**.

Jesus is with us, **in the boat**, and **yes, it's annoying that he's asleep in the stern on a cushion**, but **that's only because he knows how brave** and **courageous** and **wise those who follow his way can be**, **AND** he **knows that his anchor is in a deeper place** and **no storm is going to swamp him** or **blow him off course**.

He is tethered, and **so are we**, and **when our fear makes us timid**, *as it does, and will*, when we **register our complaint** and **despair** and **fear**, **he'll wake up**, **pierce us with what is true**, and **remind us that all is well**, ***always***.

He'll get a little exasperated with us, **ask us why**, *after all this time*, *after all we've been through with him*, **he'll ask us why we still have no trust**, **no confidence**, and ***in the very asking***, he will **invite us to remember just how deep our anchor goes**.

I don't know all that the crossings ahead will hold, *not by a long shot*, **but winds and storms are well within the realm of possibility**. ***But we've got traveling companions*—in the boat with us**, and **in the other boats that are also making the crossing**, and **we've got THE COMPANION, Jesus himself**. **Trust him**, **trust that he** *and* **his wise mind, the mind of Christ, trust that he** *and* **his wise mind live in you**, **individually** and **collectively**, and **trust that the winds** and **waves** are **no match for the peace** and **calm** and **stillness** that **go deeper still**.

It won't be easy, **but with him in the boat**, ***we all have what we need to make it to the other side***. Amen.

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