

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Rev. Jason Glombicki  
June 21, 2015

Passengers and crew loaded onto Airbus A330-300 bound for Shanghai. They eventually push back and wait to take off. The engines thrust and they pickup speed. The plane takes off, wheels are up, and they begin their climb. I imagine little children looking out the window as the once large cars and homes become smaller. Not before long the flight reaches its cruising altitude, and drinks are being served. At this point it's about 3.5 hours in the flight. Suddenly both engines fail mid-air. The airplane begins plunging – it drops 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 feet and keeps falling.

It's right there that we find the disciples in today's story. Sure, it's not midair, it's on a boat, but it's in that pure uncertain fear. The disciples' boat is taking on water, and there was Jesus sleeping. And the disciples are like, "Jesus, come on, don't you even care?"

And I get it, we've all got fears – if it's not planes diving tens of thousands of feet or boats filling with water in a storm then it's something else. We as a people are afraid of a variety of things.

A 2014 Chapman University survey found that the top 5 things Americans fear most are: 1) walking alone, 2) becoming the victim of identity theft, 3) safety on the internet, 4) being the victim of a mass/random shooting, and 5) public

speaking.<sup>1</sup> And you and I both know the list goes on.

Maybe you're afraid of spiders or dogs, maybe it's a deeper fear of losing a job or being financially unstable, or what about a fear of intimacy or a fear of being alone or even the fear of missing out.

And what about hate crimes? After watching the atrocities of Charleston unfold on Wednesday we know this is a real fear. After all 33% of all hate crimes were against black individuals and 20% of hate crimes were lesbian, gay, bisexual. Our black and LGBTQ brothers and sisters make up over half of all hate crimes in 2013 according to the FBI.<sup>2</sup>

What if we don't fear hate crimes? Maybe on this father's day, father's are fearful about being a good father, or maybe we have feared our own fathers. Maybe we also fear disasters – tornados, floods, power outages, pandemics or major epidemics. Disasters can be sudden and scary. This last week I watched our church-owned rental units and the church itself take on water in their basements. In that moment I was afraid of the impact of that flood.

And like my fear of the impact of the storm, the fear of the disciples in the boat might not only have been fear of the storm. The disciples might also have been afraid of the impact their journey and the storm might have. After all, the disciples are following Jesus to the "other side" – to the Gentile territory. It's the first time in Mark where we see these fishermen

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.chapman.edu/press-room/2014/10/20/what-americans-fear-most-new-poll-from-chapman-university/>

<sup>2</sup>

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/18/us/charleston-church-shooting-maps-and-suspect.html>

follow Jesus to a destination that might be considered a bit dangerous, even inappropriate.<sup>3</sup> There's plenty to be afraid in this journey, and in the midst of it all Jesus says "Peace! Be still!" and the wind dies down.

Jesus speaks, and all is calm. Interesting. Perhaps you're skeptical about this event. I mean, we call it a miracle but do we really believe it? Over the next few weeks we're going to step into a bunch of Jesus' miracles. And David Lose notes that "each time we will be challenged with how to treat them. Living in a modern world, we have a hard time with miracles, wanting either to overlook them as somewhat embarrassing elements of a by-gone world view," you know like treating demon possession as mental illness, or we want to "make sense of [miracles] rationally."<sup>4</sup>

In Leif Enger's book "Peace Like a River" he says, "Real miracles bother people, like strange sudden pains unknown in medical literature....People fear miracles because they fear being changed."<sup>5</sup> And so here the disciples are with a tumultuous sea and they're probably not only afraid of the storm but also afraid of being transformed from fishermen to disciples.

And maybe that's just it. What we really fear in our fears, in other words what debilitates us, is that we're afraid of change. We're afraid that a flooded basement might change our plans, or that with identity theft just might mean we

need to change our way of looking at the world.

It's striking in today's reading that Jesus doesn't say, "do not fear." No, Jesus gets that life is full of scary things - our lives can be isolating, full of pain, problems, and rejection. Yet, what we know today is that fear doesn't have the last word. Throughout the entire Gospel of Mark people are afraid time and again. Yet, through it all there is Jesus present in the fear. God's presence breaks forth into our world with us. God is with us through the tornado warnings and church shootings. God's presence is forever with us.

In those moments of fear when we feel like the boat is sinking, God is there to remind us to be still and have peace. In the midst of an airplane dropping 30,000 feet, we were reminded that pilots accompanied those passengers on the journey - pilots who were able to start those two engines back up and pull the plane back into successful and safe landing in Shanghai.<sup>6</sup>

In the midst of mass shooting in Charleston this week the ELCA Bishop of the South Caroline synod reminds us that when one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer.<sup>7</sup> So we stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized as our God is with them. This is really important for us as people of privilege, and so I want to be very clear. It doesn't matter if you're republican or democrat, conservative or liberal, when a

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<sup>3</sup> Zink-Sawyer, Beverly. *Feasting on the Word*. "Proper 7: Mark 4:35-41."

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/06/pentecost-4-b-on-miracles-and-change/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel\\_news/article-3098861/Singapore-Airlines-plane-plunges-13-000-Feet-Rolls-Royce-engines-fail-hitting-bad-weather-South-China-Sea.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-3098861/Singapore-Airlines-plane-plunges-13-000-Feet-Rolls-Royce-engines-fail-hitting-bad-weather-South-China-Sea.html)

<sup>7</sup>

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs164/1102200742508/archive/1121408405431.html>

statement that “black lives matter” is made it does not mean that all lives don’t matter. Of course all lives have value. Yet, when blacks are disproportionally treated with contempt and violence, when blacks are often not fully welcomed and affirmed in many communities, when the welcome of our God is truncated by the color of someone’s skin then we are called by our God. We are called as Christians to make a statement that our God stands with all people and those on the outside.

And next week we’ll remember our promise to be a Reconciling in Christ congregation where all are welcome, especially our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer brothers and sister. With this statement it does not mean we don’t support or affirm our straight brothers and sisters, quite the contrary. For we know that often our world supports straight white people, so we step up and make sure the world knows that all people matter – especially those that are often forgotten and marginalized and those who are the majority of targets of hate crimes. We stand up to make it clear that our God accompanies those who are LGBTQ and those who are black.

We are all on a journey accompanied by our God who reminds us that we’re love and can never be separated from our God. That’s the power of today’s Gospel. As Michael Lindvall notes, “even though there are real and fearsome things in this life, they need not paralyze us; they need not have dominion over us; they need not own us, because we are not alone in the boat.”

And Michael goes on to recall a scene near the end of John Bunyan’s classic allegorical novel *The Pilgrim’s*

*Progress*. In the scene we find the chief character, Christian, who is the archetype of a person struggling to lead a life of faith. There Christian nears the end of his symbolic journey and requires him to cross a great and fearsome river. He is desperately afraid. Together with his friend, who is named Hopeful, they wade into the waters with trepidation. “Christian cries out, “I sink in deep Waters; the Billows go over my head, all His waves go over me.” Hopeful replies with what may be among the most grace-filled words in all of literature; “Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good...”<sup>8</sup>

My friends, I’ve said all of this to remind you this day: our God is with you. Our God journeys with you in the storms of life. You have a place here at Wicker Park Lutheran church to share in the journey through the fears and awe-filled moments. As the council shares it’s final response to the Listening Project this week we are committed to journeying with you through life in the midst of exciting changes. We gather here committed to being an expression of God’s love in all we do. So too, today’s gospel reminds us that in the midst of nosedives, water logged boats, and the fears of life our - God is with us. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Lindvall, Michael. *Feasting on the Word*. “Proper 7: Mark 4:35-41.”