

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Vicar Alex Aivars
June 24, 2018

I feel that there is one part in particular in our passage for today that those of us here at Wicker Park Lutheran Church can pretty easily relate to. It's the part where water is getting into the boat... so we have water getting into a place that it shouldn't be. Does this sound familiar to anyone here? Unwanted water? Maybe? For those who don't know what I'm talking about I'm referring to the flooding of the basement that has been occurring here over the past few months. It's why we have had a huge capital campaign to raise funds to repair the basement. Now that this problem has been going on for a few months, I'm sure the question on some your minds is "God, why are you delaying taking care of this problem?"

This is the same question that the disciples in our passage for today ask Jesus in the boat "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

The scene leading up to this question being asked would be comical if it weren't so dangerous. Here they are in this small boat, perhaps no larger than a school bus, when a violent storm comes upon them. Huge 5 foot high waves start up. It's night time. And water is now coming into the boat. The disciples are frantically trying to get the water out of the boat, rushing back and forth with buckets. Everyone is in a

panic. Well, everyone except Jesus. He's asleep. On a cushion no less. He's perfectly comfortable, while everyone else is in a panic.

The small detail of Jesus sleeping on a cushion speaks volumes. How often do we picture God, high up in heaven, seated on a comfy cushion on a golden throne, with lavish robes of fine linen on? We picture God comfortable so high and far above us, far removed from the drudgery of human existence going on below. So of course, God's son, Jesus, would do the same. Even though God came down to us and was among us, here is Jesus asleep in a boat while a storm is raging around him, completely oblivious to the danger and pain going on around him. And to top it off, not only is Jesus sleeping, but Jesus is sleeping on a cushion!

I believe we have all felt like these disciples in our own lives. We wonder why bad things keep happening to us, despite the fact that we are Christians. Or wonder why God is waiting so long in responding to our prayers. Why am I still single God? Why am I not happy God? Why do I still have this chronic pain God? Our 2 Corinthians reading for today lists all of the bad things that can and do happen to us: afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger.

Many in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community have, like the disciples, asked the question "God, Why are you delaying healing and justice for us?" It's a question I sometimes ask myself as a gay man. We ask God, why has there been 13 transgender people killed already this year? We ask God, why is it still legal to

be fired for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender in a majority of states? We ask God, why do hate crimes still keep happening, despite marriage equality? Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer folks can easily sympathize with the disciples on the boat, watching Jesus sleeping peacefully as havoc surrounds Him. For LGBTQ people, it can feel like God is asleep through all of this, not doing anything. We pray and pray and nothing seems to happen. We have the same lament as those in the boat “God, do you not care that we are perishing?”

We get one answer for why God delays justice and healing, in our Job reading for today. The book of Job is about... a man named Job. He is blessed beyond measure and has many riches. But then calamity strikes Job. He loses his livestock, his children are killed, and he develops sores all over his skin. And yet, despite all of this, Job does not speak out against God. Not even when his friends try to help him... although help may be the wrong word since all they do is assume the bad things happening to Job is because of something bad he has done. Job is being corrected and punished for his sins and should repent, his friends tell him. But Job repeatedly and tirelessly says he has not done anything wrong. Repeatedly Job prays to God, asking God why all of these things have been happening to him. Finally, God answers Job. This is where the first reading that we read today begins. In essence, God is saying that we cannot comprehend why bad things happen because we cannot understand most things. God lists many parts of creation, always asking, well, where were you when this was created? Oh riiiiight, you weren't there! That's because I created you,

God says! Ultimately what God is saying is that there is some divine plan that we could in no way understand for why everything happens. We simply can't understand why bad things happen. It's just not for us to know the why.

I must confess that for me God's answer is enough. But I know for some of you, this answer isn't enough. And for those of you in this camp, I don't have a good answer for you. I do not know why bad things happen to us, even when we are Christians. But there is something that I do know. I know that Jesus, and God, will be with us when we do suffer. For me, this is the central theme of Christianity. Being a Christian will not prevent us from feeling pain and suffering, just as Jesus was not spared going to the cross on Good Friday. But Christians are promised an Easter Sunday. Jesus was resurrected. As Christians, we are promised healing, and hope. Our pain and suffering is not the end of our story.

Today we are celebrating this congregation's commitment to welcoming those that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. As stated on the website this congregation became a Reconciling in Christ congregation that is "called to reconciliation and wholeness and are challenged by the Gospel to be agents of healing within our society." We welcome those in the LGBTQ community to full participation in church life, including being able to become members and receiving the sacraments. As the website further states, LGBTQ people "and their families are often scorned by society and alienated from the Church, and we wish to make known our caring concern."

As part of this commitment, some of us, including myself, will be marching in the LGBTQ Pride parade at noon today. Last year was my first time marching in the parade. And I had a blast. It was an awesome feeling, being able to be both gay and Christian, and wearing my clergy collar, in front of a group of people. Everyone was cheering as we made our way down the street. I saw some of my friends high-fiving people as they marched along, and I thought why not, and joined in. I've never high fived so many people in my entire life. I remember thinking that if this is what it felt like to be a rock star, that might just be my third career.

The one moment I will never ever forget was at the very end of the parade. The Westboro Baptist Church was protesting the parade. One of the Westboro church members was shouting into a loud speaker. But you couldn't hear this person AT ALL. All of us in this section of the parade, which were all church going people, were yelling at the top of our lungs and drowned out Westboro. You could not hear a word that Westboro was yelling. I can't remember what I or anyone else was yelling, but I knew our message was positive. It was love. I knew that Westboro's message was none of these. Nonetheless, Westboro got to say what they wanted to say. No one was preventing that. But you simply couldn't hear them because of all of us. It was by far the loudest part of the parade route. But not because of Westboro. It was because of all of us clergy in our clerical collars proclaiming God's love to all.

People of Wicker Park, God will be with us in our hardships. Not because God feels guilty for causing them, because God did not cause them. But because of God's son, Jesus. God will be there for us and heal us and make us whole again. This is the promise of Christianity. The storm is calmed. The water no longer will get into the boat... and the basement. In the end, God will prevail.