

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's passage is an action-packed snapshot into one boat trip that took a scary turn. What started out as perhaps a simple crossing of the sea- a lazy Sunday afternoon at the lake- turned into the disciples almost losing their lives.

They cry out to Jesus:

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Other translations say:

"Teacher, don't you care that we're drowning?" (CEB)

"Teacher, is it nothing to you that we're going down?" (MSG)

On that boat trip with the disciples, Jesus was seemingly asleep! They could not believe it and they had to wake him up for him to hear their cries! It seems Jesus doesn't care that they are suffering, that the storm is raging, and he seems to be removed from the chaos all around them.

This cry from the disciples reminds me of one particular time - experience of what you could call "inner chaos- when I asked this question to God. I am an introvert and I claim that proudly now, but for about the first half of my life this caused me great pain. My elementary school teachers would ask my parents what was wrong with me- why didn't I talk ever? I got lower grades in high school because I couldn't bring myself to speak in class discussions. I felt like there was something wrong with me and I didn't see an end to what often-times felt like torture. And I just remember asking God- why would you allow this? Why would you make me like this? Don't you care that I'm in pain?

These cries of the disciples also remind me of the questions people would ask of me in a place not far from here, in the hospital rooms of Northwestern Memorial Hospital when I was a student chaplain there in the fall of 2018. I would often hear

things like: O God, why is this happening to me? Don't you care that I am suffering?
And, Where are you God?!

Perhaps you have experienced a moment like this- of great suffering or at least, witness to suffering- Or perhaps great chaos (around you or inside you)- moments when things do not go according to our logic, our plans, our ways of thinking. And perhaps you have also found yourself pleading to God with questions and searching for answers. What stands out to me In our texts today- both the Gospel and the Job passage- is how God speaks *from* and *in the middle* of the chaos.

Jesus was *in the middle* of the storm *with* the disciples and when he is awoken. And with just three words he speaks into the storm and calms the chaotic seas around them: "Peace, be still!" What I notice is that Jesus may have removed them from immediate danger, but he did not remove them *completely* from the place of the storm, from the chaotic seas below them. There are still murky, dark waters under that boat. There is still the potential for another surge in wind to come along. He speaks among this danger, and amidst the chaos.

So often we associate God with calm, tranquility, and sometimes perfection - perfection at church, or in our lives, or perfectly calm life where there is no room for a mess, no room for a chaos. With the absence of calm, we tend to automatically assume God is not there.

But *what if* God is *in the midst of* the chaos, speaking to us out of it?

In Job, too, God speaks in the midst of a great storm.

Job was a man asking the same questions of God as the disciples were, and as the patients of Northwestern hospital were. By all accounts he is a good man who loses everything- even his health - when he breaks out in excruciatingly painful sores. He cries out to God and presents his case before God **looking for answers**, looking for a reason **why** this was happening to him and wondering **where** God was in the midst of all the chaos.

And the scripture tells us that God responds to Job out of a **whirlwind**. God spoke to Job in the midst of what we might call a natural disaster- a hailing wind that we otherwise would hide from and take cover from. He asks Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you understand. Who determined its measurements? Who marked off its dimensions?”

With this- God reminds Job and reminds us of the first time God calmed the chaos- at creation- when “a wind from God” swept over the dark watery chaos to begin this work of being in the calm AND the chaos. First God separated the light from the shadows, then the “waters above” - the sky- from the “waters below” - the earth. And then God separated dry land from sea. God reminds us that God has always, since the beginning of creation, been present in the calm AND the chaos.

And God is STILL present in **both** the calm AND the chaos. In thinking about my experience in my journey with shyness and introversion - and the pain and hurt that went with it when I didn’t feel good enough or like I measured up to my peers... I wonder if I ever would have prayed or ever would have looked for God if it weren’t for those painful moments.

In my hardest moments, I turned to the church, I turned to God, and I turned to the Bible. AND, I believe, It ultimately led me to feel greater empathy for those others who suffered and for anyone in need. It led me to get more and more involved in the church and gave me the vision I have now of creating radically inclusive faith communities.

Looking back, I see how God’s loving presence spoke volumes into the storms of my life. Just like Christ didn’t abandon his followers in the boat, but rather accompanied them through the storm. Just like Christ didn’t just talk about God’s love, but embodied it. And how since creation ...for a long, long time... God has always been in the calm AND chaos.

We can still cry out to God with our most urgent questions about the storms and heartache and trials and challenges in our lives AND I pray that we would ALSO

stop. Just. Long. Enough to also listen....and hear.... God's voice.... in the midst.... of the CHAOS and the whirlwind. That voice that has been present in the chaos since the beginning. Since the beginning of all the universe.

When we take a moment to pause, to reflect on what's going on around us, we can be a bit freer to hear where God has spoken and continues to speak in the midst of the chaos. When we attune ourselves to where God's loving presence has been active, we begin to notice those moments we had strength to endure the winds, moments we were comforted when the murky waters were very much still present, and when we found that direction and even purpose in the midst of the storms. Or maybe we begin to notice stormy times of life that forced us to learn a hard truth, to grow in an area we weren't expecting, or connect with a new community.

God's presence, God's voice in the midst of chaos may not always be booming down from heaven. It might be subtle. It may be a whisper. Barely detectable. But it is there, it has always been there. Today, this week, I pray we would embrace God's voice in the calm AND the chaos.

Amen.