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Mark 4:35-41

Job 38:1-11

Psalms 107:1-3,23-32

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

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The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Stormy seas. It's something we can all relate to...whether figuratively or literally. It's a phrase we throw around to describe those times when we feel tossed about, helpless, afraid. When that nagging queasiness starts to grow in the pit of our stomach. It's the all-encompassing feeling of being overtaken by something out of your control and all you want to do is to simply get to the other side of the shore and put our feet on solid ground.

The water is a funny place – we love it when it's calm and placid but fear it when it's unpredictable and unsettling. I have a love / hate relationship with water. You all know Dwayne and I scuba dive but to dive you have to get in the water. Often times, you also have to ride in a boat. Now...I like to look at boats. I like to ride in boats. I like everything about boats as long as the water is calm...very calm...so calm that they don't move much. Because at the first rolling wave my stomach starts to churn and if the boat starts to rock side to side where the horizon dips completely out of sight I am a goner.

I hold on to the side of the boat in a death grip, willing my sea-sickness to go away, desperately wanting to get out there. My experience with sea-sickness could have ended my diving all together because it was so bad. I could have thrown in the towel, swam to shore, waved goodbye my sea-loving friends and found a new hobby. But what good would that have done?

I eventually decided to stick it out with the stormy seas. And here is what I learned....as soon as you descend under the water, the sickness goes away. Completely. You let a little air out of your BC, let your body sink down, take a few breaths through your regulator and within seconds the sensations of the stormy seas are gone. There is an element of trust that you have to have in your dive equipment to help you manage your uneasiness. As long as you relax and move farther into the water you find you are just fine. But...here is something else I learned. Once you emerge, once the dive is over and you surface, the sensation of sea sickness can quickly return – as you float in the water waiting for the boat to pick you back up, as soon as a wave hits it can start all over again. That is, if you aren't prepared.

However, on our last dive trip, I learned something life changing. As soon as you surface, you fill your BC with air, take it off, and use it to float. Then unzip the back of your wetsuit so that the cold water can wash over you. You take off the things that helped you and open yourself back up to the elements. The elements that you once struggled so hard against. And, guess what? You don't get sick. Amazing.

Do you see the interesting progression? What you were once afraid of, what once made life so very hard was the one thing you had to move into. You couldn't resist it or run away from it. You had to find a way to be with it. Yes, it took some tools (like the BC and regulator) to help

but once you stopped being afraid and started to move forward (or down as the case may be) things got easier. And then, once you were able to face the waves again, you didn't need those tools in the same way. Your needs had changed but so had you. The seas may have still been stormy but you were better equipped to adapt and as a result became stronger, more curious, a part of something greater than yourself.

Storms can make us want to run. They can shut down our confidence, make us question our own strength, create doubt within our hearts. They can make us cry out, like the disciples in our Gospel reading...don't you care, God? My heart is so troubled, I can't make sense of my world, where are you when I need you? Because facing the unknown, entering times of challenge that make us face a new and uncertain reality is destabilizing. In general, we don't like times of change, especially when those times make us feel a little sea-sick.

And, Jesus in our Gospel, addresses back to his disciples fear with that a jolt...Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?

I know a lot of you are feeling a little sea-sick right now. I hear you ask me on a daily basis how to make sense of the things going on in our world and in our nation. You ask me how to face the storms in our midst. Some of you are angry, others are disillusioned. Some of you are gratified, others are reassured. You are facing emotions ranging from fear to sadness, from hope to empowerment. I have heard it all and the range of ways we are dealing with these stormy seas is as diverse and as impassioned as I have ever experienced in my life time.

I try not to move to the political from the pulpit. I don't think that is what I am called to do. I am not called to sway you to the right or to the left. Yet, at the same time, I am called to open up a dialogue with you on how we live out the Gospel in our lives. I am called to bring you back, week after week, to the lessons Jesus taught us, to the promises our faith has given us, and to the responsibility we have to share what we have been given with others. Gifts of love, compassion, and mercy. Those tried and true Gospel teachings that are undeniable.

Those gifts aren't political. They are the Gospel. And they are here in the midst of our stormy seas. And right now, we can't look the other way. We can't run to shore. We have to let the waters begin to wash over us and move into the things we fear the most. And folks, you know what your own fears are – whether you are on the right or on the left. We all have them and those fears and uncertainties are framed by a lifetime of experience for each of us. It's understandable. But here is another thing I do know – fear is not the Gospel and it's not going to get us closer to the teachings of Christ.

Because Christ welcomed the stranger, he ate with tax collectors, he healed the outcast, and stood up for the those who couldn't stand up for themselves. He didn't cast the first stone. He taught us lessons of love, compassion, and mercy. He taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves. And those lessons can make us uneasy.

It gets tricky. Doesn't it? So, what are your fears?

Maybe they are fears of welcoming the stranger. If they are...I want you to ask yourself - where is your love, compassion, and mercy?

Maybe they are fears of listening to someone on the opposite side of the political spectrum. . If they are...where is your love, compassion, and mercy?

Maybe they are fears of standing up against hate... If they are...where is your love, compassion, and mercy?

Maybe they are fears of reaching out to the poor, the abused, the marginalized... If they are...where is your love, compassion, and mercy?

Here is thing – fear is understandable. But, we can't let fear determine our future. Because we will be afraid. We will face uncertainty and doubt and confusion. But, it's how we respond to that fear that matters.

That's where our faith comes in. Jesus keeps asking...why are you afraid? Do you not have faith?

These are questions that beg us to come back to the teachings of Christ. Over and over again. So when you ask me how to navigate the stormy seas we are living in, I will simply ask you...are you loving your neighbor as yourself? And then I want you to ask yourself...if Jesus were standing right beside you, would you be proud of the decisions you are making?

It isn't a trick question.

You have all the tools in front of you. Don't be afraid to use them. Tools of love, compassion, and mercy. Because these tools are the foundation of our faith. We have been given gifts to help guide us through these times of uncertainty. We have a tool box that empowers us through our faith to find solutions to the problems in our midst.

So, what if we put aside all of the rhetoric, all of the finger pointing, all of the facts and figures that continue to divide our communities and justify our fear. What if we put it all aside and started with a new foundation? What if we allowed the foundation of our faith to be our starting point as we work together to find solutions to the stormy seas in our midst? Because if our solutions aren't built on what we confess to believe, then we will have let fear win out in the end.

There is another way. The way of love, compassion, and mercy. And when that is our foundation, we can truly stand beside Christ and say, Yes, Lord, I loved my neighbor just as you taught me to do. Amen.