

Fishermen are sea storm connoisseurs. Having spent a lot of time on the water, they have gone through a lot of them. Let me ask you: as a group, do you think fishermen are more or less likely to be afraid of storms? On one hand, their accumulated aquatic experience might give them a broad perspective that not every storm is truly dangerous as well as the personal confidence that if they find themselves in one they will know what to do. On the other hand, they are likely to have gone through a few storms that were so harrowing such that each new storm might trigger fearful memories and make it feel more dangerous than it is. I suppose a fisherman's fear might have as much to do with his internal reality as it does with the external reality of storm.

Today's Gospel reading is taken from the Gospel according to Mark. In it, as we just heard, as Jesus and His disciples cross the Sea of Galilee, they are overtaken by one of the sudden, violent gusts of wind and rain that are common on that body of water. Even though the boat on which they travel is on the verge of being swamped, Jesus is asleep on a cushion. Being awakened by the frantic disciples, Jesus speaks to the storm; immediately, it subsides into a total calm. When Jesus then encourages His followers to have greater trust in God and in Himself, they are stupefied and wonder what kind of person He is to have such command of even the wind, the waves, and storms. You might remember that, according to church tradition, Mark wrote his Gospel while listening to St. Peter who was in a Roman prison awaiting his own death by crucifixion during Emperor Nero's persecution of the Church. Because time is short, Peter is in a hurry to dictate his experiences to Mark so that Mark can bring them to Jesus' other persecuted followers in Rome and to reassure them Jesus is still with them even while they suffer. Therefore, many of the details Peter shares are colored by his awareness of their fear. For example, only Mark's Gospel describes how Jesus, while being tempted in the wilderness, was menaced by wild animals: that is because only Mark's audience is facing the real threat of being menaced by wild animals in the Roman

Colosseum. For this reason, while the story of Jesus calming the storm that threatens the disciples is found in two other Gospels—Matthew and Luke—Mark’s version of the story has one unique feature. In Matthew and Luke, the frightened disciples awaken Jesus and simply ask Him to save them from drowning. But in today’s reading from Mark, their pleas to Jesus have a certain edge: “Teacher,” they cry, “do you not care that we are perishing (4:38)?” In their fear, they cry out not only because they are afraid to die but because they are afraid that Jesus no longer cares about them enough to save them. Peter’s flock in Rome is, as it were, in the same boat. The persecuted Roman Christians cry out to God to save them; they cry out to God to notice them, to pay attention to them, to care for them, to love them. No matter what form our personal storms might take—medical crises, economic crises, marriage crises—our temptation is to wonder whether God is paying attention to us at all. Like fisherman, even if we are connoisseurs of personal storms—even if we have endured and been delivered from any number of them—we all either experience a storm of such intensity or have been so traumatized by our earlier experience of storm that, even if we have faith that there is a God, we may wonder whether He cares about us enough to help us.

This is why today’s Old Testament reading comes from the Book of Job, the oldest book in the Bible. You will remember that Job was a very good man whose devotion to God was matchless. Nevertheless, because of a wager between God and Satan—who in this story is described more as God’s prosecuting District Attorney than as God’s inferior enemy—Job loses every one of his life’s blessings: his crops, his livestock, his children, and his health. Satan had bet God that if Job lost these blessings, Job would turn away from God. Sitting in the ashes of his loss, scraping his wounds with his now-broken pottery, abandoned by his understandably bitter wife, for the next thirty-seven chapters Job endures the insensitive judgment of his so-called friends who, while visiting him, conclude that he must have committed some heinous sin to have deserved such apparent punishment from God.

Throughout it all, Job maintains his faith, but eventually he demands that God stand before him and explain why he suffers. Shockingly, God shows up. Instead of answering Job's question or explaining or justifying Himself, God begins to remind Job of how little Job understands about life and God's created order. Because only God, not Job, was always there from the beginning, only God, not, Job, truly understands what is going on. Our reading today comes from a part of this divine reminder, in which God says, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? [...] Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? When I made the clouds its garment, and think darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed boundaries for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?' (Job 38:4, 8-11)" After God finishes His address to Job, He restores everything Job had ever lost and commands him to pray for his so-called friends who arrogantly and self-righteously think they understand God and the ways of God better than God.

This reading from Job is deliberately chosen to complement today's Gospel reading about Jesus' stilling the storm for two reasons. First, Jesus is the God of Job in human flesh; Christ has total power over the storms of life in the cosmos because in the beginning He created the primal elements from which they come. God does not cause the storms that afflict us, but He deeply interwoven not only into the past origins but also their present circumstances. God simply *is*, and therefore simply *is* exactly in the middle of anything else that *is*. No matter what happens to us, God is deeply aware of us and is woven into we are going through. Second, Jesus is God's answer to Job, and to all of us in our Job-like moments. Specifically, God's answer to Job about where God is amid our suffering is the Cross. On the Cross, God takes full responsibility for the totality of His Creation and everything that happens in it, whether natural, supernatural, interpersonal, or even existential. His Cross-

born wounds are mysteriously connected to ours. Because He loves us, He is always with us, no matter what.

That is what faith means, and that is what faith does. We sometimes think of faith as a simple assertion in different forms that there is a God: the Jewish faith, the Muslim faith, the Hindu faith, the Christian faith. We also sometimes think of faith as an historic repository of statements about the nature and actions of God accord to one of those forms, like what we find in the Creeds. Where faith finds its power and meaning is in a personal, emotional investment in an awareness that there is more going on than we perceive. In a recent podcast produced by Mockingbird Ministries, Episcopal priest John Zahl—the brother of David Zahl whom we hosted at a book signing in our Parish Hall two years ago—encourages us to think about any significant storm that experienced more than ten years ago. He asks whether, looking back, we would prefer to have reacted in one of two ways: A, as as we did at that moment, or B, as we know and understand now, ten years later. Faith is the grace to experience life now—A—but with the certainty that one day we will understand it later—B. Faith does not mean that the worst storm in life will not happen; faith means that there is no storm that cannot be redeemed.

Like the disciples in the boat in the Galilean storm, like Peter and his fellow persecuted Christian in Rome, we may sometimes cry out to God, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” God does care. God cares so much about us and our specific circumstances that He entered His own Creation to perish as we do so that He might not only raise us from the dead but to simply be with us and walk beside us even while we are afraid. The God who first made the wind and rain knows how to save us from the storms that are their consequence. And so, together, in faith, as storm connoisseurs who stand hand in hand, we face the storm, trusting that in it we will one day find God.