

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 7, Confessio Augustana, 25.vi.06
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3,23-32, II Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to
come! ✠ Amen.

*He said to the, "Why are you afraid?
Have you still no faith?"*

-- Mark 4:40

Where is *your* faith? Where is *our* faith? Where is the Church's
faith today?

Today's Gospel, as well as the other readings, are perfectly
summed up in the Collect for today, one of the Church's most ancient
prayers:

*O God our Defender, storms rage against us and cause us to
be afraid. Rescue Your people from despair, deliver Your
sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us all from
unbelief. . . .*

God's faithful servant Job, in today's First Reading, accepts none of the
lame explanations of his loss offered by his friends. He knows himself
to be guiltless and the suffering and loss that has befallen him to be
without moral merit or apparent cause. Still not in despair, but out of a

sense of fear and abandonment, Job calls out to God. God's reply comes with the terrible power of a desert sandstorm, God's voice speaking to Job out of the whirlwind. "*Who is this* that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" The LORD pounds home the point to Job that Job is in no position to question God, but He still does not sweep Job the questioner away, nor does God give in to the Devil and allow Job's life to be taken from him. That Job will endure, that he will remain to sing God's praise, having lost everything and everyone precious to him, will serve as a living memorial to living God.

In today's Psalm, a mariner's prayer of thanksgiving that parallel's today's Entrance Hymn, the Psalmist recounts what it feels like to be in a storm at sea, in a storm that indeed rages all about us—above us, under us, and all around us—and to have survived what not all do survive, to finally be safely, peacefully in home port. None of life can be taken for granted any more after such an experience. Instead, the Psalmist looks and directs us to God, Whose mercy and power is alone equal to the killer storms of the sea.

The Apostle Paul wants the self-satisfied Corinthian Christians to understand what it is to live like that, to live our lives in God's hands, taking nothing for granted, as our right, but rather seeing all of life as a gift. Paul recounts the many sacrifices and privations he and his coworkers have endured for the sake of their ministry, not only privation, imprisonment and physical persecution, but, worse than all that, unjust attacks on their character. The Corinthians need to 'open their hearts wide' and to enlarge their theology to comprehend the richness of God's grace not in good times only but in times of trial and hardship.

Today's Gospel, which mirrors the Psalm, Jesus is with the Disciples in a small boat on a very large inland sea. That fishing boat might not have been so small by our standards, perhaps 20 or 30 feet in length and with a fairly deep draught, but it would have seemed tiny as all boats and ships do when tossed about by the power of the wind and the sea. Jesus is in that boat, with His Disciples. He is sleeping through the storm, exhausted from preaching to the people at Capernaum. His Disciples are experiencing the wakefulness of terror. Their lives and,

for that matter, Jesus' life and His message of the Kingdom of God are all about to go to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. The Disciples awaken Jesus, alerting Him about what was about to happen, *rebuking Jesus* in ways the Evangelist chose not to record in detail but rather to sum up in this way: "Rabbi, do you not care that we are perishing?" It was, essentially, Job's question. It is, essentially, the question of all humanity, of all time, down to the present day and hour.

This is the point where the similarity between the stinging rebuke Job gets from God and the Word of Our Lord in today's Gospel differ sharply, thanks be to God. For Jesus, who is rebuked by His terrified Disciples, does not rebuke them. Instead, He rebukes the storm, thus revealing both His power and His love. The Disciples experience the power of One they *thought* they knew, of One Who is obviously of a different order than the teacher they thought they had been following, as Jesus grants them the peace of all mariners safely home after a storm they thought they would never survive. But He does something else. After the storm is stilled, when He turns to speak to the Disciples, Our Lord asks them a rhetorical question, and He asks this

apparently as ‘softly and tenderly’ as the old hymn we will sing today expresses. “Why are you afraid? Have you still, no faith?”

It is not as if there were no storm, and it is not as if the Disciples yet knew in Whom they were to put their faith. It is not as if there were nothing to fear in this life, and it is not as if overcoming that fear by means of trust in a God and a divine love we cannot see came naturally to any of us. The world is a fearful, frightful place, and it always has been. But He Who was and Who is and Who is to come is greater in power than all the storms of this world, and His love is greater than our unbelief.

We may think that, in the so-called ‘War on Terrorism,’ the storms of this world are raging around us in a new and unparalleled way. That is hardly the case. Islam has been waging war against the rest of the world since its inception, in the 7th Christian Century, and it is simply our turn now. Anyone who calls for or promises an end to this war in our own lifetime or that of our children, our grandchildren or great grandchildren either has no grasp of this fact or is lying to achieve some political advantage—or both. Add to that problem the dreadful

challenges to the global environment, the still unaddressed scandal of blinding and massive poverty in the face of plenty and the ever more real threat of world-wide plague and I believe that men and women today whose concern extends beyond the ends of their noses can be forgiven for observing with alarm that storms do indeed rage against us and cause us to be afraid.

The same whirlwind was raging around the Christians of Europe during the time of the Reformation and specifically in that year of 1530 when Emperor Charles V convened a meeting of the estates of the Western Christian Empire to unify Christians in faith and in some very important a joint policy. Emperor Charles, Martin Luther and the men and women of their day may not have been facing global warming, but instead of an avian flu pandemic they had the bubonic plague, small pox and a myriad of other killer diseases and instead of Al-Qaeda they had the Muslim Empire of the Ottoman Turks, a power that had conquered and subjugated the Christian East, was greedily swallowing up huge parts of Southeastern Europe and headed straight for Vienna and all points west.

It was at one such meeting of the Holy Roman Empire, in Saint Mary's Church in the imperial free city of Augsburg in Bavaria on today's date in 1530, that the Lutheran princes and theologians formally presented their position as Lutherans but also as Christians and members of a Christian society threatened not only by the Turks from without but by corruption and error among Christians from within. The wording of the Augsburg Confession, one of the basic doctrinal writings of our Evangelical Lutheran Church, could have been more circumspect in places and certainly fairer to the positions of those who opposed the Lutheran movement, but the times were not tranquil enough for the best choices in wording, and time itself seemed to be running out as the hordes of Muslims warriors with their slaves and mercenaries approached.

The one guiding thought and principle that resounds throughout our Lutheran Confession before the Emperor and has upheld our Evangelical Lutheran Church these nearly five hundred years is *faith*, sheer faith in the Lordship and the love of Christ present among His people. It rings back and forth like a church bell throughout the

Augsburg Confession. This is not a blind faith, not the Muslim's faith in 'God's will,' whatever that may be, as though God were some puppeteer, pulling the strings of history and of people's lives here this way and there another way, just as it pleases Him and for no other reason. Our faith is not a trust in *fate*. Our faith is trust in a *promise*, in *God's* promise made from the foundation of the world.

That promise God made in creating the world and us in it, in preserving it through the æons, despite our disobedience and ingratitude, is a promise God *keeps* radically and powerfully by God becoming human in Jesus Christ. Our faith, the faith we first received in Holy Baptism, is faith that God wills life rather than death, that God's love and mercy is boundless, including all humankind and the whole creation, that God calls us out of despair and dread in a meaningless world to *hope* in the world God now shares with us, in the life God now lives with us in Jesus Christ.

As did Jesus in that storm-tossed little boat, among that group of terrified little men, the Christ in Whom God's nature and purpose for the world is revealed does not expect us to have faith without knowing

Him. And as He did from the moment they got out of that boat together all the way to the Cross and beyond it to the miracle of Easter, Christ Our Lord does not wait for us to discover Who He is. Instead, He comes to us, over and over again, in His Word and by keeping the promise of His presence in the meal He commanded us to share, coming to us that we may know Him also in our neighbor, whatever his need may be. Where is our faith? *There* is our faith! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who love us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !