



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

306 N. Division Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 • (734) 663-0518 • www.standrewsaa.org

Sermon for Sunday, June 24, 2018

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

FR. CHARLES WITKE

Job 38:1-11 | Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32 | 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 | Mark 4:35-41

In our reading this morning from the Book of Job, Job finally gets the answer to the multiple questions he has been asking God after his terrible suffering begins, after death takes all those he loves and he is deprived as well of his great prosperity, and he begins to question why God rewards his righteousness with endless calamity. By now he has worn himself and his unhelpful friends out with this questioning, so God finally answers him, and he gets more than he bargained for. He got the rebuke we just heard. But he also got something else. He got a gift that is easy to forget and hard to remember: that in the midst of the various troubles, setbacks and failures in our lives this God who speaks in the midst of a whirlwind chooses to be in unending relationship with us.

Job, we recall, had it made: and he had every reason to think so, and that his journey through life was richly blessed: a large successful family, high social status, enormously prosperous, and all the rest. And when all that is suddenly taken from him, he asks God the question we all have asked or will ask at some point in our lives: Why has this happened to me? Why am I, who am innocent and upright, be made to suffer, while the wicked flourish and prosper? And if we are paying attention, Someone, with a capital S, reminds us from our whirlwind that He is God and we are not.

In a situation unfolding like this, it is a good idea to keep in mind that even if Job didn't get answers to his questions, he did get God.

Job certainly found out that life has surprises. So too did Jesus' disciples in today's reading from St Mark. Jesus has had a long encounter preaching to the crowds by the shore of the Sea of Galilee from a boat, and he and his followers begin to go across the lake to the other side. This small body of water, 13 by 8 miles, is still liable to violent storms, like the one threatening the crossing in our Gospel today. Good sailors, the disciples sail into the storm, which however proves too much for them, swamping their boat.

They have seen Jesus over their time with him cure diseases, cast out demons, and otherwise demonstrate his divine powers. Nevertheless they perceive the situation they are in as hopeless, and awaken Jesus: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he removes them all from the storm menacing the boat to a new state of safety. And not just that:

to a new place of understanding, even if they do not yet grasp it completely, saying, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" When things get bad enough, even our familiarity with Jesus' power to help and save can be eclipsed by our fear.

In the ensuing calm, note what he says to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" In these perhaps impatient words, he brings together two very important words in our religious experience, and two very basic human traits: fear and faith. Faith is the stance we take to withstand those things that threaten us, which are our fears.

Jesus here is teaching us that the opposite of faith is, more often than not, fear, not doubt or unbelief. Thus in tension with faith is fear of the unknown; fear of the stranger and others different from us; fear of the unknown future out of which may spring changes that are unwelcome in our health, our economic security, our long-cherished stories about our well-being in our world. How we with God's help manage what threatens us makes all the difference between faith and fear. We can negotiate doubt, but fear is existential and doesn't go away.

In our own lives, in times of doubt and uncertainty, we may well ask, "Teacher, do you not care?" There are many kinds of fearsome reality that can overtake human life in addition to unexpected change, where fear can eclipse faith. We human beings can have a lot of questions; we may even fear others of God's creation who are unlike us. God may seem to reply to our questions with yet more questions as he did to Job out of that whirlwind.

But Jesus is right in the whirlwind, the storm, with us. In the Gospel story, he's in the same boat with us in several senses. In time of trouble, we try to wake God up to take care of us. But he is present with his people and concerned for us even when we do not perceive his presence or care. As Jesus said to the storm endangering the boat on the Sea of Galilee, so he says to the storms encountered in our progress through the world, "Peace! be still!" And to us: "Why are you afraid? Can you not yet trust God?" "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?" We could be on the way to finding out.

Amen.