

June 21, 2009 12 Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Samuel 17:32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; Mark 4:35-41
Sermon Title: "Facing the Storms of Life"

Call to Worship from Psalm 9

I will praise you, O Lord with all my heart
I will tell of all your wonders.

I will be glad and rejoice in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

The Lord reigns forever;
God has established The Lord's Throne for judgment.

God will judge the world in righteousness;
God will govern the peoples with justice.

Sing praises to the Lord, enthroned in Zion;
Proclaim among the nations what God has done.

Arise, O Lord, let not man triumph;
Let the nations be judged in Your presence.
Strike them with terror, O Lord;
Let the nations know they are but humans.

Prayer of Confession:

We confess before you, O God, that we are a people with great fears. We worry about what is happening in our world and we let anxiety overpower us because we simply do not have enough faith. We sometimes feel like we are riding in a sinking boat and the stormy gales threaten our homes and our families. But you, O God, are able to calm the storms of our lives and point us in a direction that will demonstrate greater love and faith. Forgive our lack of faith and help us to see you at work in the rough seas of life. We pray in the name of the man who stilled the waters. Amen.

Hymns: #267 All Things Bright and Beautiful
#642 Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies
#Insert: Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man who stilled the Waters.

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Sermon Title: "Facing the Storms of Life"

There is not a single person here this morning that has not faced some stormy weather in their lives. In reality, storms seem to be the norm. Peace and quiet are but short interludes between the winds of outrageous fortune. If it is not a faltering economy that is eating away at our retirement savings, it is pathology report from the doctor that seems to indicate that cancer has gotten a foothold in your body. And if it is not something that is happening directly to us, it is happening to our family members and loved ones. A child diagnosed with diabetes at age one. A father-in-law who has liver failure due to cancerous lesions throughout his body. A phone call in the night advises us that one of our children is in trouble. A spouse or a parent is no longer able to function due to onset of Alzheimers. Storms come in all shapes and sizes.

Some storms come like a thief in the night and hit us like a tornado, and boom, everything we have is torn out from under us. And some storms come in a more deliberate fashion and build slowly, causing immense stress and strain over a long period of time. In both situations we wonder why it is happening to us, as if we had some predetermined dispensation from God that we wouldn't have to face storms. The fact is that storms happen to everyone. If you are alive; If you are breathing; If your heart is still pumping blood and you can determine the difference between night and day, you are subject to the storms of life.

Some storms happen simply because storms happen. Life is that way. The longer you live, the more prone you will be to experience the storms that accompany the ageing process. My father lived to the ripe old age of 97 years and three months. The last five years he was totally blind. Macular degeneration took his

eyesight. It was a storm that he faced by learning how to read books on tape, so that every time I called to check on him I could ask: “What book are you reading now?” And he could tell me all about a book he was reading about the Queen of England, or some mystery novel by A. Conan Doyle. He loved reading and saw no reason why the storm of blindness should keep him from his favorite pastime.

You see, when storms happen the real issue is not the storm, but how we react to the storm. We can choose to face the storm and discover some new strength, some new insight into life, some unrealized wisdom about God’s creation, or we can shake and tremble in the back of the boat and shout at God: “Do You not care that we are perishing?” When we are beset by storms we are faced with the emotion of being lost. Lost simply means that we are not in control. Barbara Brown Taylor, in her wonderful book, *AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD*, talks about being lost. It is her way of alluding to the storms which her life has faced. She shares an experience of being knocked off her horse by a low hanging branch and having a head injury. Suddenly this strong, in control person finds herself lying flat on her back in a hospital bed with instructions not to move for several days. Listen to how she experience this storm in her life...

“When I woke again, I reached up to feel the stitches in the back of my head.....

A friend showed up, who told me nothing was broken.... She also explained that I had a concussion... at the moment my job was to lie still.

I did my job well for the next several days, learning to use a bedpan because I could not balance well enough to stand upright. When I fell asleep, I fell into nightmares so vivid that I fought to stay awake. When I was awake, I struggled to use a brain that did not work the way it used to. I felt as if I had suffered the sudden onset of senile dementia. I could not

remember words. To complete a thought took ages, to complete a sentence even longer. When someone came to see me, I had to swim my way up out of murky depths to focus on a face or recall a name.

The first miracle of this time was that people took care of me when I could not care for myself. When I was knocked out cold, someone called an ambulance for me. Someone stitched my head. When no member of my family knew where I was, a stranger brought me food. Since I have made a point all my life of being the one who brings food, not the one who needs it, this reversal did wonders for me. To receive hospitality of strangers changed me far more than providing it ever did.

The second miracle was how safe I felt, although not in any conventional sense. My head hurt like hell. I had such depraved dreams that I could not imagine where the vile images in them had come from. Wild dogs ate babies, while skeletons rattled their loose bones at me. Had the concussion opened a sewer line in my head? Was a demon messing with me? In the grip of those nightmares I feared I might die, or at least never return to who I had once been. Yet as badly as I was frightened, I was also held. The safety I felt was located far beyond my pain and fear. When I closed my eyes I could almost see it – beyond the foot of my bed, beyond the wall of my hospital room – a second net that I could see through the ripped strands of the first, one I knew would catch me no matter how far I fell. Although my injuries were human, my safety felt divine.

*An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor,
pp. 79-80*

You may have never fallen off a horse and cracked your head. But you have had other things happen to you. Storms that have thrown you off and upset your world. Storms that have threatened your safety and well being. When it happened to Barbara Brown

Taylor, she looked for the messages and blessings that are communicated to us in the midst of the storm. She calls them miracles, and indeed they are. Miracles are what happens when God breaks through and gives insight that calms the storm. That is what God does. God works in and through the storms of life to bring about Peace. If you and I are going to ride in the boat of life, we have to get used to storms. Our fears can keep us out of the boat... or better yet, our fears can keep us from discovering the miracles that God is revealing to us in the midst of the storm.

Now, look at those men in the boat. They had been with Jesus through some very difficult times. They had listened to his teaching, his stories and his parables. They had experienced his healings and watched him challenge the conventional ways of the Old Religion. But when Jesus awoke to find them in such a frenzied state and calmed the sea, they still did not see the miracle. They thought the miracle was all about calming the water. No, the miracle was all about their faith. Jesus says it best: “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” And those disciples missed the miracle entirely.... The message in the midst of the storm was that God is in control. Their faith needed to acknowledge God’s omnipotence. But they couldn’t see beyond the waves that were stilled.

How about us? Can you find God’s miracle in the midst of the storms you face? Sometimes. But other times we let the storm overpower us. We focus on the illness, the cancer, the broken hip, the dementia, the blindness, the aching joints. And we say to ourselves, why has my body forsaken me this way? Or, we focus on the situation, the loss of financial support, the marriage gone awry, the child who messes up in school, the parents who need our attention. And we say, I don’t want to have this bother in my life.

But God gets in the boat with us. And God demonstrates that no matter how harsh the storm is, there is always a redeeming message that comes through the storm, a message of love, grace and peace. Yes, God got in the boat with us in and through Jesus of Nazareth. And the miracle is that we do not focus on the death as the end of the story, but on the resurrection.

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