

“In the Storm”  
The Rev. Lauren McDonald  
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – June 21, 2009  
Job 38:1-11, Mark 4:35-41

It somehow seems appropriate to have all these storm images in our lessons today after living with all the storms that have been besieging us lately.

We’ve got God speaking to Job out of a whirlwind. The Psalm describes a storm at sea in which the people were thrown to and fro like drunken people as the waves tossed the ship. Our passage from Mark tells the familiar story of Jesus sleeping through a storm on the Sea of Galilee until his disciples wake him up, berating him for not caring that they are about to drown.

In our world we are not only dealing with the literal thunderstorms that have been passing through southern Virginia on a daily basis, but we have also been struggling through metaphorical storms: a tempestuous economy, turbulent debates in politics between parties in our country and turbulent debates about theology in the Anglican Communion, violence in cities that edges ever closer to threaten our security, unpredictable terrorists, and unseen threats from climate change, possible biological warfare, and nuclear missiles that may or may not head our way. And as if all the national and international tempests weren’t enough, many of us are facing our own personal storms: frightening illnesses, loss of jobs or income, the deaths of loved ones, kids or grandkids who are having trouble, the end of a relationship, moving, selling a house, aging parents, and I could go on and on.

The people in our lessons today raise the same questions that many of us probably ask. God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind because Job has asked why he is suffering, has demanded that God account for what has happened to Job. The disciples cry out in the midst of the storm, “Teacher do you not care if we are perishing?” How often do we want to cry out, “God, are you sleeping? How can you stay quiet in the midst of all this suffering? Don’t you care?” We want to know why God doesn’t do something about the situations in the Sudan or Iran, why God doesn’t take on AIDS and malaria in Africa, why God doesn’t save people from hurricanes, earthquakes, or tornados. And we want to know why God doesn’t make each of our personal storms cease and be still.

We don’t get any answers from our scripture readings. In the Job passage God does speak but doesn’t actually answer Job’s questions. God asks Job where he was during the creation of the earth. Essentially God says, “I am God and you are not. Who are you to demand an accounting of me?” Then, in the Mark passage, when the disciples wake Jesus up and ask him why he doesn’t care that they are perishing, Jesus seems angry at them. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” These were fishermen in this boat. They had certainly been through storms before, so this one must have been pretty bad to frighten them so much. It doesn’t seem quite fair that Jesus would be angry with them when their boat was being swamped.

I’m no fisherman, but I’ve been on a boat when an unexpected storm blew up, and let me just say that I did not sleep through it. My family and I were having a sun-filled day on Lake Lanier in Georgia with some friends of my parents. In the afternoon we were out on the lake in a sailboat when a storm

came up out of nowhere. We were not able to get back to the dock and had to ride the storm out on the lake. Most of my family went down to the cabin below to be out of the way. I begged to stay above because I get seasick in calm water, and I knew that being below in a storm would have me heaving up lunch in a matter of minutes. So I sat in the front of the boat, tucked inside the windshield, clinging for dear life, and hoping our hosts knew what they were doing. I can't remember now if I prayed. But I know I didn't curl up and go to sleep like Jesus. What I remember is how the wind and the waves tossed us around as if we were ants. I remember the urgency of my hosts as they tried to maintain control of the boat. I remember how frightened I was of the violence of nature around us. I felt small and out of control and afraid. I would like to think I cried to the Lord in my distress as did the people on the ships in our Psalm. Eventually the storm did quiet to a whisper and the waves of the lake were still.

We don't know why the storms come. No amount of demanding will give us the answers. Like the disciples we are afraid. Like the disciples, being in the storm stretches our faith almost to the breaking point. Like the disciples we ask, "Lord, do you not care about our trouble?" And it's okay that we do. When we ask questions, when we tell God we are angry or sad or afraid, we are in relationship with God. God doesn't need us to pretend that everything is okay. God can handle our anger, our fear, our grief. God wants to be in relationship with us, and that means we need to be honest with God. Even Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for the cup to be removed from him before praying, "Let your will be done." Even Jesus told God how he felt about the storm that would send him to the cross.

I don't think God sends the storms to test our faith or to remind us of our dependency on God. But I do think that God is with us in the storms. And I also think God can redeem the storms. Jesus may have been asleep in the back of the boat when the wind came up on the Sea of Galilee, but he was there with the disciples all the time. And when they asked him, he calmed the storm. We may think that Jesus is sleeping through our troubles, when he's actually right there in the boat with us.

The disciples were slow to figure out who Jesus was. When he calmed the storm they learned more about him. Here was a man whom even the wind and the sea obeyed. Here was a man who had power over nature. As we progress on our spiritual journeys, we too must learn who Jesus is. He is the one who can sleep through the storm, not because he doesn't care, but because he trusts his Father. He is the one who can bring peace, even when we are in the midst of the storm. He is the one who is always with us, even when we are most afraid.

We are like the people in the psalm who go down to the sea in ships. We will continue to encounter storms. When we cry to the Lord in our trouble, the Lord will deliver us from our distress – though not always in the way that we might think best. The Lord will still the storm to a whisper and quiet the waves of the sea – though not always as quickly as we might like. Then we will be glad because of the calm and because the Lord brought us to the harbor we were bound for. Let us give thanks to God. God may not always give us the answers we demand, but God always gives us the love we need.