

Today's gospel lesson is about a storm. It is a story about Jesus calming the winds and the waves in the sea of galilee. Before we get into all of that, let me start here.

Storms can be scary. Many nights I have sat in my house watching the weather reporters talking about tornadoes and large hail. Straight line winds that pack the power of a tornado, gusting upwards of a 100 MPH. Just last October, during a family reunion, Candice and I slept on the 6th floor of a condo complex in Gulf Shores Alabama as Hurricane Nate made land fall. The beach that was about 100 yards wide was swallowed up by the waves, the wind was crazy and the rain really did seem to be coming from every direction. That was only a category 1 storm. Honestly, I wasn't scared. I felt safe. I was in a sturdy building, I had the weather folks plotting the path of the storm on the TV and I was just relaxed knowing that everything was going to be OK.

My mom, Karen, on the other hand cannot say the same about gulf coast storms. A few years ago, while she was wintering down there, Candice and I had gone to visit for a week. There was a line of thunderstorms moving in, and being from Nebraska, we don't get scared of thunderstorms easily. She decided because it was a warm night in February that she would take her glass of wine out to the patio that overlooks the pass leading to the gulf and watch the storm roll in from the south east. There was lightening off on the horizon and you could hear the distant rumble of thunder. Candice and I were inside watching something on TV and just relaxing when suddenly there was what we call a FLASH BOOM. That is where lightning and thunder happen simultaneously. Out on the balcony we see two hands get thrown up in the air and through a very thick glass door which I think is probably not sound proof but close, we hear mom's voice call out to Jesus.

Now, in all fairness, I think the tone that was struck was more along the lines of using it in vain than that of an actual prayer being shouted. Candice and I instantly start laughing so hard that we were crying by the time she gathered herself and made it back into the condo. It wasn't until the next morning that we realized the full ramification of that come to Jesus moment. There was an almost full glass of red wine that had been thrown at the door in the moment which started the laughter all over again...this time, mom included. My best guess is that lightning had struck the water of the pass just outside of the condo or one of the buoy's that marks the entrance into the pass probably less than 200 or 300 yards away.

What Candice and I witnessed, and I am sure mom probably felt in that moment was unbridled fear, complete terror. Looking back, I feel bad that I laughed as hard as I did. But it did make for a funny story that centered around a storm and fear that helped me to connect to today's Gospel lesson where the disciples displayed some fear. But fear of what? The storm? The waves? We may have to think about that a little bit more.

Let's transport back a couple of thousand years ago, and think about some of the context around today's story. In the verses before today's, Jesus had spent quite a bit of time telling

parables that you are all familiar with. The parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the sower and the parable of Light under a basket were all things he talked to the crowd about before he and the disciples set out across the sea...which from my reading is more like a big shallow lake. The sea of Galilee is only 13 miles long and 8 miles wide and the deepest part is only a 141 feet deep. Big, but when you think "Sea" you think something much bigger. Lake Michigan for example is 307 miles long, 118 miles wide and goes down to 923 feet deep. Also, from a little bit of reading I did about the sea of galilee, it is prone to bouts of high winds and then sudden calming due to the way the winds come off the cliffs that surround much of it on 3 sides. I don't bring these metrics up to put you to sleep, but to provide some context. The disciples were made up of men who would have been familiar with how this body of water behaved so when the winds picked up and the waves started crashing over their boat which was probably big enough for about 15 people they wouldn't have been expecting it. Actually, when they found a boat from Jesus time in 1986 they calculated that it was maybe 27 feet long, 7.5 feet wide and about 4.5 feet high. There would have been spots for 4 rowers to help move the boat along. These fishermen wouldn't have been easily frightened by the water, but in today's lesson we must assume that this wasn't some common storm because the disciples were freaking out. Something else must have been going on. These men were scared and when they went looking for their teacher who was supposed to be freaking out with them, where was he?

That's right, he was asleep in the stern of the boat on a cushion. He knew he needed to catch some rest while they were on the way to the other shore to teach to the gentiles and this, to Jesus, seemed like as good as any. After all, he had people on the boat that knew what they were doing and it wasn't like they had far to go. Out of nowhere, there was a big storm that brewed. High winds, waves crashing over the side of the boat filling it with water. I am sure there were probably a big FLASH BOOM or two, the disciples were scared, they didn't know what to do. They turned to the person they had committed to follow and found him sleeping.

When they woke him, they were, what I would describe as mad. They point blank asked him "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Let me say that again. "Do you not care that WE are perishing?" These men, in this moment thought they were going to lose everything. They had followed this teacher, they had left their lives behind to be with him and here he is, asleep in their moment of need and fear.

Jesus had just 3 words. "Peace, Be Still" and the wind ceased and a great calm came over the sea. He could have left it at that but he didn't. He turned to his disciples and said. "How can you have no faith? Why are you so afraid?"

Just so you know, sometimes I get skeptical. I ask questions. I like to ask questions and that is OK and to be expected. There were less than 15 people on that boat in that storm how do we know that the calming of the storm wasn't just some parlor trick, or maybe even just coincidence that the disciples mistook as a miraculous event in their fear? Why in the world would these seasoned fishermen be concerned about this particular storm.

As I thought and prayed about that, I realized that it didn't really matter if the storm was literal or big enough to scare the disciples. The words that Jesus spoke hold true no matter what happened.

Peace, Be Still.

Even if it was coincidence that the waves calmed, Jesus may not have been speaking to the waves and the wind.

Peace, Be Still.

A reminder that they were all in this together. When he speaks to their faith he is responding to them being angry. Remember, they were mad, they were in the midst of a storm and he simply said "Why are you afraid, have you no faith?" He was telling them to have faith, they were going to be OK. Those words spoken to the disciples in that moment to reassure them and maybe even remind them of their training. Have faith...I am with you, you are going to be OK. Words of reassurance.

But how do we apply that lesson today? We are not going to be on a boat with Jesus in the middle of a storm, but I contend that we all have our own storms that we are dealing with and just like the disciples sometimes it can seem like Jesus isn't with us or simply doesn't care.

Peace, Be Still.

Why are you afraid, have you no faith?

It might be that you are fighting an illness, you might be fighting with a friend, work might be dealing you a bad hand or you might be dealing with a difficult decision. You might be doubting yourself or your abilities. You have a storm brewing on the horizon, the distant rumble of thunder is approaching. You have every right to be afraid.

Peace. Be Still.

No matter your storm, you have the training. Your training is in everything you have learned to prepare you for this moment. Sometimes, you need to understand when it is time to leave the balcony. Sometimes you need to figure out when the right time is to run to the balcony. It all comes down to faith. During hurricane Nate, I had faith that I was going to be OK, my family was going to be OK. I didn't have to demonstrate that faith to anyone though. Sometimes in our own storms, either literal or figurative, we must show our faith.

So how do we show our faith today? Do we run out side and shout that we are believers? Do we talk about the saving grace of God with everyone we meet? That isn't always necessary. As I see it, we can show our faith in variety of ways. We can hug that friend or family member that needs a hug. We can listen without judging. We can accept people for who they are and what they believe even if you think or know they are wrong.

Our world is becoming more and more polarized. Social Media is meant to bring us closer together but in a lot of instances it is driving us apart. In some places and in some ways, it is becoming harder to admit that we are Christians because we might get looped in to policies or political ideas that we simply do not agree with. No matter the side of the aisle, no matter the denomination, showing your faith can be hard and that too is scary.

Peace, Be Still.

You can show your faith by living the words of Jesus.

Peace, Be Still.

When the world seems to be in disarray, when nothing seems to be going right, remember those words.

Peace, Be Still.

I am going to leave you with a call to action today. Your challenge is to live in the faith that Jesus spoke about on the boat that day 2000 years ago.

Peace. Be still.

Listen to someone that needs to be heard, listen to yourself in those moments of storm and understand that Jesus wants you to demonstrate faith. Faith in him, but also faith in your network, faith in your education and faith in yourself.

Peace. Be Still.

Fear is OK, being scared is OK, but remember, we are all in this together and God continues to demonstrate his love for us in our lives if we simply remember:

Peace. Be Still.

Life won't always be easy, Life won't always go according to your plan but:

Peace, Be Still in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ!

Amen.