

STILLING THE STORMS

June 24, 2018

Psalm 9

Job 38:1, 8-11

Mark 4: 35-41

2Corinthians 6: 1-13

We have had some amazing storms in our neighborhood this year alone and in particular, we do not even need to talk about snow, but we can cast our thoughts back only a few weeks to May 15 when 2” size hail hit Livingston Manor and totaled many cars. Other towns in the Northeast were hit by hail storms as well and there were reports of tornados too. The strangeness of this particular storm was, one, that it seemed to have all to do with cars and the damage that they endured, and, two, that it was intensely local. The cars in Livingston Manor and Shandeleer were covered with terrible dents and had shattered windows, yet just around here in Beaverkill we were oblivious and seemed not to have had any hail at all.

June 1 was the beginning of hurricane season and we hope and pray that we will not be subject to the catastrophic storms that have laid waste to Texas and New Orleans and Puerto Rico and Florida and all the many other areas, including our own, that have suffered so desperately in the past. Yet doubtless something will happen somewhere - earthquakes, tornadoes, typhoons and volcanos - phenomenons of earth, air, fire and water in some devastating fashion. All over the world, we are afraid of these events. From a sermon from Seattle, I picked up that “if Minnesotans

are afraid of tornadoes and if Floridians are afraid of hurricanes, the people who lived on and near the Sea of Galilee were afraid of wind squalls that came suddenly, with no warning, onto the Sea of Galilee with devastating power. The Sea of Galilee is six hundred (plus) feet below sea level.(lowest

fresh water lake on earth) It is a body of water ten miles long and four miles wide and there are deep crevasses that come down into it from the east side. The winds come off that desert plateau above the lake and drop suddenly down into the lake and become a nasty wind squall that can suddenly create enormous waves.*

And this is the story of the storm in Mark, that of a small group of boats just crossing the sea of Galilee, at Jesus' suggestion let me point out, when a storm suddenly comes up. Now they all knew what to do in a storm - they live by the sea, they make their living there, they are sailors. Everybody was needed for doing what was needed to be done. The sails are reefed, water is bailed, the oars are put out, and everyone pulls at it. That's what people do in a storm. It says in Mark's gospel that Jesus was sleeping through it. Now that is really a miracle if he was sleeping though it, but that is what it says. Anyway, the disciple awakens him and asks him to help. "Do you not care?", they say. Instead, Jesus rebukes the storm and makes it go away. Yes, he rebukes the storm and makes it go away! The crew is filled with awe... that is not what one does in a storm. No, you reef the sails and bail the boat. You might even drown, but you don't stand up and scold the storm and send it away. These experienced sailors find that their known world is out of control. Their assumptions don't hold in the kingdom that Jesus is describing for them.

With Job, we see a colossal four chapter chewing out that Job receives from God, basically saying to him, "Who do you think you are? Where were you when I created the world?" He talks to Job in detail about that kind of thing for pages and Job is brought up short, reminded that the final word is God's, no matter how strongly a person may feel about their own goodness and righteousness. Job

struggles with God about authority and control, and Job loses. And that is the kind of storm that Job endures.

But really, these stories seem to be all about maintaining control in the face of the extreme force that is attempting to wrest it away. To maintain control of one's life, of one's ship, of one's mind or heart... just not to have everything become upside down and lost.

Being in control of one's life is a virtue that we admire greatly - the discipline of the athlete, the successful professional, the wise investor, the accomplished artist. And by the same token, one of the harshest judgements that we make is on those deemed out of control in one way or another - to let your car get out of control may be a crime, to let your emotions get out of control is often embarrassing, to let your garden get out of control may even get you fined in some places, and with the mind out of control, well to call that an illness is just the beginning. Yes, we take control very seriously, and there are good reasons for that, for we are responsible people, responsible for ourselves and to one another.

We know that we cannot be responsible for everything however, and that is what our texts for today point to and what I would like to talk about with you. For people of faith, there is a particular limit to the control that they have on their lives, because, after all, the Bible states that God and Jesus have ultimate control or final authority. But even if one is not quite certain of what that faith is in, still there is a limit to the control one can have over ones own life. You are just not in charge of everything whether you are a believer or not, as witness the vast numbers of hurricanes and volcanoes, bank failures and stock market crashes that you did not cause.

So this is a struggle. These stories in the Bible describe a dicey, sometimes difficult situation where we are not sure whose life it is anyway. Who is running things? The tension is between being responsible for ones own life and having God or Jesus as the ultimate authority. And we have two stories that talk about that - one is the story of Job in the Old Testament; one is the story of Jesus stilling the storm.

Both of these stories take place in the boundary between individual responsibility and God's authority, and they brush up against the question of whose life is this anyway and who is in control, who is in charge. Job knows for certain that he is good by his own standards. The crew knows exactly what they are supposed to do when a storm comes up - especially they know that they are not supposed to go to sleep. In each case in these biblical stories, God trumps their assumptions with greater authority. Greater power and greater priorities. And there are many stories like this in the Bible, and there are in our lives as well. When we come up against a problem with our work, with our family, with ourselves, often we feel that if we just clamp down a little bit harder, exert a little bit more of what we know has worked in the past, a little bit more of that, yes, control, then everything will be the way it should be. After all, control is the position that we should be in, isn't it?

The KING OF SIAM IN THE "KING AND I" is perfect example of a man struggling with control issues. I'll just give you a couple of examples from the wonderful song, "It's A Puzzlement":

When my father was a king

Markquart, Edward: "Sermons from Seattle"s in Seattle"

He was a king who knew exactly what he knew
 And his brain was not a thing
 Forever swinging to and fro and fro and to
 Shall I, then be like my father
 And be willfully unmovable and strong?
 Or is it better to be right?
 Or am I right when I believe I may be wrong?

There are times I almost think
 Nobody sure of what he absolutely know
 Everybody find confusion
 In conclusion, he concluded long ago
 And it puzzle me to learn
 That tho' a man may be in doubt of what he know
 Very quickly he will fight
 He'll fight to prove that what he does not know is so
 Oh, sometimes I think that people going mad
 Ah, sometimes I think that people not so bad
 But no matter what I think, I must go on living life
 As leader of my kingdom, I must go forth
 Be father to my children and husband to each wife
 Etcetera, etcetera and so forth
 If my Lord in Heaven Buddha, show the way
 Everyday I try to live another day
 If my Lord in Heaven Buddha, show the way
 Everyday I do my best for one more day
 But is a puzzlement

I think that these stories are telling us, listening to them in the here and now, to pause and think of another way. It not that we should lie down and go to sleep in the storm, or that everything that we ever did before was wrong and we should remember that it was God that made the world. It's only this: sometimes we have

had the same quarrel a hundred times and think that we can win by force of will. Sometimes we have tried to maneuver our way through a problem at work by exertion of power; to manage a family issue by the same argument; to change our own behavior by simply being better at doing the same thing ... and we know, we all know, that this is not always going to work. Just doing what we always do, just harder and harder, even if it is right... that is not always going to work.

We have to just step back for a while and let something else come into our mind. Maybe it will be Jesus telling the sea, "Peace! Be still!", or maybe it will be God telling Job that it is really God who is the big dude around the yard. But more likely than that, if we just take a rest from trying so hard to be in charge all the time, if we just sit back and survey the territory for a while, something new will come breezing across the fields. There is so much more wisdom available in the world, so much more wisdom that we have accumulated in our brains and our souls, that if we just take a few moments to gather it, a few breaths to make it a part of our lives, we will be able to face storms so much more valiantly. I have heard it said, "We have within us, each one of us, so much more power than we ever spend, such misers of miracles are we, such pinch-penny guardians of grace."**

Now, I don't know about you, but too often I don't practice stillness. In a bad situation, I more often think that something needs to be done and done now. Well, what if we practiced stillness? I mean, just waiting a minute. We don't have to be Jesus sleeping on the deck of the storm wracked boat, but still we do not have to be charging to the heart of every storm as if it were ours to subdue. What if we claimed the power and authority to slow our own response? What if we took stock of our situation a bit more before we acted? With the disciples, we might recognize

that our situation is not as desperate as it seems; and if, saints forbid, it is that desperate--it can still be handled better by a calm, reasoned approach.

Let's just ask a question first, or say a prayer, and seek a wider answer than what it is that we are used to. When this story or parable is told in Mathew (Mathew 8: 23-27), it ends with Jesus saying to his disciples, "Why are you afraid, ye of little faith", one of the famous quotations of the Bible. "Ye of little faith" is something that we are always throwing around at one another and yet this is what we must be remembering. Do not be worrying about being in control, for that just tightens up the soul. Do not be a miser of miracles... have faith, and the storm will end.

*Wade, Rev. Francis, "Whose Live Is It". 1997

**Buechner, Frederick,

Markquart, Edward: "Sermons from Seattle"s in Seattle"