
A Who Do You Trust in the Midst of a Storm?

The Reverend Carolynne Williams
Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 21, 2009
1 Samuel 17: (1a,4-11,19-32) 32-49
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

My dad was a sportsman. He loved every aspect of being in the wild as he hunted quail and, occasionally deer. He also loved to fish. Many times when he embarked upon enjoying a day of fishing or a day of hunting he would go alone. He had the occasional hunting partner or fishing buddy or if we were visiting my maternal grandparents in Richmond, Virginia, my father and grandfather would charter a deep sea fishing boat, invite some of the men in the neighborhood and off they would go.

I sometimes wondered why my Father would not take me on these adventures. I later learned that this was the men's group. Of course when they returned with their coolers filled to the brim, and overflowing with fish they would call out to the women. Their call to the women was for preparation of the fish for the freezer. Or, if it was hunting those rabbits had to be skinned. And of course the quail. They had to be dressed.

My mother choose not to engage in any of that activity. Dining on quail or pheasant under glass has absolutely no appeal to me either. There is nothing intriguing or romantic about sharing an evening meal with the lights low if the entrance resembles any of the aforementioned choices.

When my father went fishing alone, it troubled me, even as a teenager, because my concerns centered around the possibilities of the weather changing and a storm coming up while he was out on the water alone.

Please remember that this was long before the days of cellular telephones and GP devices.

It troubled me so much that I asked him if he was prepared if the weather suddenly changed from being serene and the water like glass, to a place of troubled water where the wind and the waves carried the potential of throwing him about.

He told me that he always watched the weather report and wore a life vest. I can attest to the fact that he never took his preparation procedures for granted as they were a ritual for him. He said that he said his prayers, did not worry and always relaxed. That was the purpose for the fishing and hunting trip in the first place, according to him.

Being alone has its merits especially out on the water in the midst of the solitude and quietness.

Being out on the water on an average day is usually calm and peaceful. The wind, however, can bring a storm with raging winds that can develop in a matter of minutes. We know not where the wind comes from nor where it goes.

Jesus knew the merits of being alone when he went to the mountains to pray. Being alone is to intentionally place oneself in

an environment that will provide a space to unplug from the noise of the world. When we unplug from the noises of the world, when we plug in the "white noise machine," we give ourselves permission to be with God and put everything else on hold. We give ourselves permission and courage to trust God to come closer, so we can think into our space.

Jesus felt it necessary to be alone so that he could commune with God and to model prayer for us. He also came down from the mountain to continue to carry out the will of his father, God.

For the disciples, the storm raging, and the winds tossing the boat about on the sea, pushed them to the center of turbulent circumstances. When the force of nature changed their direction and gained their attention, their immediate expectation was not met. They had lost control.

Their fear pushed them to ask this man of whom they had seen perform miracles, Do you not care? Do you not see what is happening to us?

They had faith, but they also were afraid. They had faith yet Jesus asked them "Are you still without faith?"

Does that question have significance for us today?

One Sunday, I greeted parishioners following a service I preached. One parishioner paused to say, "You preach about Jesus a lot, don't you?" I responded, "Do I?" He said, "Yes. Why is that?" I looked at my watch intentionally and asked, "How much time do you have?" We both smiled. I invited him to return the next Sunday to continue our conversation. He has returned several times, and I have seen him from afar, but we have not had the opportunity to continue our conversation.

I am tempted to believe that this man perhaps trusted in God the father, but has not had his expectations met. I suspect that this man has been tossed about and questions who Jesus is and wonders what significance this man who lived over two thousand years ago has in his life. How can Jesus have any significance for us in the kingdom of God today? What is the kingdom of God?

How can we, you and me, look to something that often seems to be distant and far away and entrust our very lives and livelihood to this entity?

"The stilling of the storm continues to reassure the church in every time of persecution and distress that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is ruler of nature and history, and that he is present with his disciples in their anxiety." (Interpretation) pg. 102)

The implication is for each of us to walk past the anxiety when we see it coming and whisper, "I am going to trust God explicitly, this time." And when we whisper those words, perhaps more to ourselves than to anyone else, we will find ourselves in a place that says to us "peace be still. Peace be still." When the waters of life are washing over us and when the tumult is raging high. Peace, peace be still.

My father continued to fish until he was 95, his age when he died. There were circumstances of life that presented themselves and entered his space, probably more than I will ever know, but I also recall that he trusted God.

How do I know this? I can see him in my mind's eye, his aged body kneeling by the side of my parents' bed, praying, before he went to sleep. Not just some nights, but every night.

That is the one image that I carry today. That is where I settle. A praying father. That is what he did. He prayed and preached. I don't know what he was praying about or for. But I believe that he had to pray occasionally for the storms of life to cease so that he could be at peace. So that he could live without anxiety.

That inner peace which surpasses all understanding. Even when there is not a storm. Which is most of the time.

So to father's, godfathers, grandfathers and to all who have been like a father"

Happy Father's Day.

Amen.

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