

St Giles 23 June 2024

Safety and Storms

In the year 1900, when the British Empire was at its largest, Queen Victoria was returning on her yacht from a visit to Ireland, when she was disturbed by rough seas. Historian Barbara Tuchman describes the moment: "After a particularly strong wave buffeted the ship, the queen summoned her doctor, and said, "Go up at once, Sir James, and give the Admiral my compliments and tell him the thing must not occur again." But the waves would not stand still. The storm raged on.

The sea is a powerful metaphor for all that is beyond human control.

In our reading from Mark today, the disciples are with Jesus on a boat when a storm arises, and they fear that they will drown. And Jesus is asleep on a cushion, completely unperturbed. Then Jesus rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Be silent!" and the wind calms down.

Storms of course, are not just wind and rain and waves.
Storms are not only a problem for sailors.
Storms are not only dangerous in a boat.
Storms have many shapes and sizes.

Storms arise in our lives.

There are many things in life that might feel like they are too much, like they might overwhelm us.

There are many types of waves that seem to be coming over the edge of the boat.

Sometimes the most difficult times are the quiet ones

Sometimes things might look calm, but there's a storm inside of us.

I think that to be alive in this world is to face storms.

Jesus says “Be still!” and the wind ceases.

But storms don't do what we tell them to do. We cannot change things with the wave of our hand. We cannot reverse time or undo bad things that happened. Some things that are lost, some people that are lost, cannot be found again.

But still.. We have lived for years in this world full of storms.
I think we become good at living with storms
Each one of you, I'm sure has been through many.
You have lost people that you love
And you might have challenges that I don't even know about
Just as i have challenges too

“Let us be kind to one another, for most of us are fighting a hard battle.” said ”Ian MacLaren a minister of the Free Church of Scotland.

The whole quote goes like this:

“Most of us are acutely aware of our own struggles and we are preoccupied with our own problems. We sympathize with ourselves because we see our own difficulties so clearly. But let us be kind to one another, for most of us are fighting a hard battle.””

This is where we can find some relief from the storm – or find Jesus in the midst of the storm – not in our challenges disappearing necessarily – but in being kind to one another and kind to ourselves.

And that might allow us to get through the storm without it being as much of a problem

We can see our own storms, that keep on raging – and We can maybe let ourselves get wet

And still know that everything is going to be okay.

Biblically, the sea commonly represents God's power in the Bible. Think of Noah and Jonah.

Psalm 107, which we read today, says:

he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.

he made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Isaiah 43:2 says:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

The sea is power that is beyond human control.

In ancient times, Roman emperors were called "masters of land and sea."

So when Mark writes that Jesus masters the sea, he shows that human power only goes so far.

The force that drives the cosmos, that created for example, the complete solar eclipse we saw recently, is beyond our comprehension.

Dylan Thomas' writes

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees

Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

(pause)

To be alive in this world is to face storms.

Jesus stills the storm.

But is it not our nature to be on that boat, to be tossed by the waves, to be churned up, unsteady, unwell sometimes. We are fallible, imperfect, tired, hungry, alone, surrounded by storms, filled with storms.

Jesus brings hope, conquers fear.

We are weary and weak and prone to error.

One of my frequent, more desperate prayers is to ask God to be able to hear what he is saying to me – it's such a common prayer I think for many people: Speak to me, God. Let me hear you. I don't know what to do.

Why is it so hard to hear God? To cut through the static?

And I realize I have this kind of guilt for not being able to hear, that I somehow believe, if only I prayed harder, maybe THEN I would hear what God is saying.

But maybe we are not meant to hear Jesus in the way that we hear another human voice – in the way I can hear the sound of my own voice right now, or the sounds in this room. At least, not all the time. Clarity from God is rare.

And certainly I can't demand God to show up in the way that I want him to show up.

How can I, when I am human, hear God?

How can I, when I am mortal, hear the immortal?

How can I, when I am unsure, hear certainty?

I know that God is there, because I have felt it, in my heart, at times.

But sometimes I don't feel it. Not at all. Certainly not in the heart of a storm.

It's almost like we are in parallel universes, God and me.

God is in God's world, I am in mine,

God is in heaven, I am on earth.

God is in colour, I'm in black and white.

And yet, something about this way of thinking is liberating, because it's no longer up to me to free myself from whatever storm I'm in, because I was never meant to be able to. It's not up to me. My human mind and heart cannot reach Jesus, cannot hear Jesus, cannot feel Jesus sometimes, but Jesus reaches, hears, and feels me. Furthermore, I think Jesus even has faith, in my stead.

American priest Richard Rohr says:

"Many scholars have pointed out that what is often translated in Paul's letters as "faith in Christ" would be more accurately translated as "the faith of Christ." It's more than a change of prepositions. It means we are all participating—with varying degrees of resistance and consent—in the faith journey that Jesus has already walked.

For example, in Romans 3, Paul writes: “the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, **22** the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ[d] for all who believe.”

We might think we have faith in God. But God also has faith in us.

Jesus is there with us when we are in a storm, even if the storm is not stopping.

A quote from Allison Hill, who owns a hair salon in Toronto, and took up running during the pandemic, then started a running club for black women of all levels and body types. She was interviewed on CBC radio:

“I think one of the strongest things that running has taught me as an entrepreneur is that hard things are supposed to be hard. And I think if you can respect that, then you can move through life with grace. There are some runs that you go on, and they're supposed to be in zone two. And you're supposed to be able to talk and chit chat and have a great time. And then there are some runs that are supposed to be in zone four, and those are supposed to be challenging because you get those nuggets that get you to the next thing. So, when I'm facing something in life, I have to ask myself, is this supposed to be hard? If so, do what you need to do to get through it.”

((pause))

God is many things.

In the case of a runner, who determinedly puts one foot in front of another, when her mind is screaming, Stop, I can't! – then perhaps God is her determination, perseverance.

God is the quieter of our storms

God is relief,
God is a sliver of hope
God is the steadiness of Jesus in the face of the disciples' despair.
And God is the stilling of the waters.

But God is also there while the storm is raging, when we don't feel his presence, don't see God or hear God.

God hears us in distress..even **if** distress rages on.
Christ has faith, even when we no longer do.
Jesus prays for us, when we no longer can.

The writer of Ephesians says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works."

((Pause))

Allison Hill talks about how running is not just a physical practice. She says "It is a physical thing, but it's a much harder physical thing when your mind's not in check."

To run is to move our body, but it is also to engage our mind.

The mind can become a storm
The mind says this is hard, I can't go on.

But when our mind is in line with our body, the world feels bigger .. we are part of something bigger, part of everything. We are not just a solitary runner, with our own storm raging inside of us, but part of a community, like the community of runners that Allison Hill started. We share our journey with others.

And our fight to finish a run becomes not just a matter of dragging our body across the finish, not just a solitary, isolated thing... but the path that we run, is one that has meaning – it shows that to get through a difficult run is something that we CAN do – and after we can congratulate ourselves and each other for making it through...

We can see the hard things that each one of us does, simply to live in this world – recognize one another, share in each other's success, and see beyond ourselves, and our own personal storms.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

amen.