

**Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA**

**The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: June 23, 2024**

## **The Storms of Life**

**Rev. Dr. Lois Williams**

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. Our Old Testament reading and the Psalm seem to tie into our Gospel as they display the greatness of God. And to this day, for all our scientific discovery, we are no closer to answering God's questions on creation than Job was. This leads us to the understanding that our relationship with God should always be one of awe, mystery, and a willingness to accept the unknown.

The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful body of water. But because it is surrounded by hills, and is 700 feet below sea level, it is prone to sudden, violent storms, like the one in our Gospel today. You could be out on a boat enjoying a beautiful day, and quite literally out of the blue, a life-threatening storm could hit you. One minute, things are quiet and calm; and the next, there is a raging storm threatening to have you perish.

Doesn't it seem to be the same way with life? It was beautiful that day, but by evening a storm has come along quite suddenly. And I think that many of the storms that face us in life – the physical, emotional, and spiritual storms – are like that. One minute, life is going along quite smoothly. Quietly, calmly, routinely. And the next minute, quite suddenly and out of the blue, something happens which throws our life into complete and total chaos. We are all really a phone call away from perishing in the storm.

We all face these kinds of storms. There's simply no way to get through life without them. You might be facing one of these storms today. I may or may not know about it. It may be raging within, and threatening to overwhelm you with doubt or despair. If that is the case, and even if it's not, there is much that we can learn from this powerful story in Mark's Gospel.

In one of Martin Luther's sermons, he began by pointing out that *"the first lesson of this Gospel is that if you want to be a Christian and want to have the gospel, you must anticipate rough weather, for it is inevitable."*

There is a strange pull between positive and negative, and when everything is balanced, we sometimes become static. We become too comfortable. But as the Book of Job points out, we are often tested and challenged by the world in which we live, and in order to cope, we often have to grow spiritually. The saying "God only gives you what you can handle," seems a bit trite, however, right here, right now, you have survived 100% of your trials.

The question is, what have you learned from your experiences, and has your faith strengthened to a point of accepting there will always be awe, and mystery, with lots of unanswered questions and somehow find a comfort in knowing that? Interestingly enough, today's Gospel contains an equation that ensures our ability to get through a storm, to calm ourselves even if we have to wait patiently for things to resolve.

That little gem of faith can be summed up in the disciples' question to Jesus, when they woke him up as the storm raged around them.

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Because *“Even though he sleeps, Christ is in the boat.”*

Even though Jesus is presented to us as sleeping during this storm, our faith leads us to trust that Christ is with us in the boat, and with us in the storm. He may seem to be sleeping on the job, so to speak, but he is still with us. And so, to go again to Luther’s words:

*“When distress strikes and he does not help immediately, no matter, just hold fast, do not waver, but firmly believe that Christ is with you in the boat. For in his own good time, he helps.”*

Christ is in the boat with us. And in his good time, he will help us. And why would Jesus wait? Is this a combination of life lessons one needs to learn for spiritual growth? Am I being called to take the high road, so I need to review my situation better? Am I called to be an active participant against an injustice because it happened to me? Or maybe it is the age-old question, why me, or why now?

And this brings me to one more lesson that I want to add. Because it seems to me that Christ is not just in the boat asleep. He can also be woken up.

Our faith and our prayers can wake Jesus up. When the disciples found themselves in the midst of that terrible storm, when they struggled with doubt, and wondered whether Jesus even cared about them, they still managed to do one remarkable thing: They woke Jesus up.

Isn't that the point? Even as Job questioned God and received a rebuke, in the long run Job understood there would be awe and mystery, and Job understood his faith had been tested, and in the end, he had been saved.

The disciples felt scared and panicky enough to wake Jesus up, to ask for help. They had been tested, and in the end saved. They were beginning to understand and accept the awe, and mystery walking beside them. Tested and growing in faith.

And isn't that the gift and blessing of being part of a church community? In the church, like in that boat in the storm, there is always somebody who thinks to wake up Jesus. That's why we need each other; why we need this community. Because when we're caught in the middle of life's storms and panicking, we can often forget to wake up Jesus. But there is always someone in the church to do it for us. Our faith is made stronger by the presence of other disciples.

Part of the mystery and awe is our commitment to look after each other in person, prayer, and spirit. We will personally and communally continue to wake up Jesus. Amen