

Sermon

Preacher | The Rev. Zachary C. Nyein

The Gospel | Mark 4:35–413

Date | June 27, 2021



**ALL
SAINTS'**
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

God, to you all hearts are open. Open them wider still, to one another, to your world, to your will, for love's sake. Amen.

Good morning and Happy Father's Day to all fathers and father-like figures. And to those for whom this is a day of grief or pain or disappointment, may you know the love and care of this community as we come before our loving God who is Father, Mother, and Creator of all.

There is so much we can mine from these exceptionally familiar stories today of David and Goliath and Jesus calming the storm. I love that even Jesus takes a nap. It's a powerful reminder that if even the Son of God can rest, then surely we can too. I hope you're finding time for rest and renewal this summer after the long 15 months we've all just endured.

Michael and I are prepping for annual family time in Michigan this August. A cherished time when 1 great-grandmother, 2 grandparents, 5 kids, 5 in-laws, and 11 grand kids — 24 in total descend on Northern Michigan — every year, without fail for a week of eating, swimming, playing Euchre, catching up, and most of all being together. It feels so wonderful to resume a sense of normalcy this year after so long in isolation.

So candidly, I'll admit, I felt hopelessly fatigued when my sister-in-law recently shared that she will be asking the family to wear masks. Really? Still? As a young, vaccinated, able-bodied person with no dependents, my personal risk tolerance is high. At this point I only wear a mask in spaces that require them and am perfectly comfortable singing, exercising, shopping, and eating among large crowds. Likewise, I recognize the encouraging data from schools this past year suggesting a relatively low risk for most children.

However, you see, my niece Charlotte is not most children. Charlotte has down syndrome — which renders her heart vulnerable and her immunity compromised. For her, access to a vaccine, which we pray will come soon, is crucial. Truth be told, there are so many experiences and privileges that might always be inaccessible. She might never be able to drive independently. That doesn't mean no one else should ever drive a car. She might never get to be a mom. It doesn't mean no one else should have kids. She still needs us to wear masks to ensure safety. It doesn't mean we'll need to for ever, but this temporary inconvenience for the rest of us communicates a permanent truth

about Charlotte — she is beloved. And she is infinitely worth it. We are family. So when my sister-in-law said you know, we've kept her alive this long; we're not gonna screw up now, there was no question in my mind. I would do anything for Charlotte. If it wasn't family I'd probably say forget about it — let's do our own thing this year and try again next year. But Charlotte is family. And while she's 1 out of 24, we follow a Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 for the 1.

All Saints' is a family — not of 24 — but some 2,800. Truthfully, there have always been homebound parishioners unable to attend church for a variety of reasons. That doesn't mean none of us should go to church or that we will need to wear masks forever. But this temporary, continued inconvenience for some communicates a permanent truth for all who need just a little more time and precaution to be safe: You are loved, and you are worth it, because we are family. Not fellow club members, or sports team fans but siblings in the mystical Body of Christ — united by faith to proclaim one Lord, one Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all. As we strive to truly live into that glorious reality, I'm so proud of our family and thankful for Simon's leadership, the public health task force, and all the saints who have worked together to keep everyone safe. Fatigued as we may be by ever evolving protocols and precautions, We will continue to weather this season as a family.

Speaking of weather, an oft missed detail in Mark's mercurial miracle tale today is that there were other boats. How often do we become so obsessed on the state of our own boat — our own bubble, household, health, interests, anxieties, job, church — that instead of remembering we belong to Christ, we begin to believe that he belongs to us. It's telling that we call our sanctuaries the nave — as in naval, a ship. But Jesus isn't into patching up boats with bandaids today. His power and compassion extends far beyond the disciples small-minded self-concern. In silencing the sea and calming the waves Jesus himself becomes an icon of God's ultimate authority over creation. Jesus lifts our gaze to recognize that we as the human family are not all in the same boat, but we share the same storms. Jesus not only calms the storm; Jesus rebukes it — Mark uses the same language used to describe the exorcism of demons and casting out of evil. Beyond merely bouoying the disciples' boat, he quietens the very powers of darkness as one who came not to fix our personal problems but to bring peace for all, changing the environment and dismantling systems of oppression in away that causes everyone to benefit, everyone to win, in an act of liberating love reflective Martin Luther King Junior's famous insistence that “no one is free until we are all free.” It can feel like a loss for those on the inside, who had Jesus in their boat, and yet, I believe Jesus is inviting the disciples and us us to a deeper, more mature, empathic faith — in which no one has a corner on the kingdom.

Activist Opal Lee, age 94, of Fort Worth is known as the Grandmother of Juneteenth. Five years ago at age 89 she made a 1,400 mile pilgrimage on foot to Washington D.C. to advocate for the national recognition of Juneteenth, short for June 19th — which commemorates the date in 1865, two and a half years after Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, when more than 250,000 enslaved people in Texas learned that they were finally free. If you’re like me, you may have not heard of this important day for so many African Americans until the past few years. I remember learning in multiple classes throughout my childhood that the “real” independence day was July 2 but it took the news two days to travel. Just as it took news of African American emancipation not two days but two years to break through the resistance of those who would keep the good news hidden, for many of us our own learning about Juneteenth was delayed by not days but decades. Of course, Opal Lee lived joyously to see her work pay off this past Thursday when Juneteenth was indeed made official. In a statement, she called “Juneteenth a bridge that should be celebrated from June 19th to the 4th of July. So if you’re going to celebrate freedom, let it be celebrated for everybody.”

People of God: The truth is we are not all in the same boat. We never have been. Juneteenth confronts the hard and unchangeable ramifications of the fact that some people came to this country willingly in boats from Europe and others came by force on boats from Africa and the chasm could not be greater. These two extremes do not account for every experience — such as the Native peoples who were already here, Europeans unwillingly trafficked onto this continent, and those who came from other places altogether but the unjust legacies of those first voyages of conquest and of enslavement still remain.

As we look out on all the storms and chaos of our day: COVID, racial reckoning, climate change, mass incarceration, civil unrest, gun violence, mental health crises — we are not in the same boats. We never have been, nor do we need to be, to find unity in the waters of baptism and in the storms we face. The enemy is always the storm — not the other boats. We’re in the storm together.

Don’t you care that we are perishing, Lord?

Every lifeguard knows that if you can speak you can breath and if you are breathing you aren’t drowning — you might just be dramatic. Of course Jesus cares — the question is do we care enough to look beyond our plight, to get out of ourselves, out of our heads enough to see the wider angle. To see those in the storm with us.

If it was just about our little boats — this would be a wonderful lesson about facing our fears, and pulling ourselves together and drawing on forgotten inner resources, and our own sheer resilience, which is so often actually the privileges of wealth, time, and health masked as virtue. Jesus doesn’t ask any of those things of his disciples. The miracle on the water is chiefly a work of God’s grace.

Paul knew something of God's grace — having had his life transformed as a persecutor of Christians turned disciple and pastor after encountering Christ on the road to Damascus. In our Epistle today he urges an embroiled church in Corinth: not to accept the grace of God in vain — as if it has no effect on your common life together. He is writing to a church struggling to be reconciled to God and one another — bickering over proverbial paint and carpet colors instead of pressing onward with the work of ministry. The remainder of the passage reflects a frustrated leader at his wits end. To a community consumed with self-interest, competition, and narcissism, Paul does not use sophisticated rhetoric. Instead he candidly, and ironically, rather haughtily, bears his soul to the community he loves — listing his hardships and credentials as proof of his affection and imploring them not to total agreement — but simply this: to open wide their hearts.

There is grace upon grace to be found even in the storms we face — chiefly the grace of Jesus' loving presence and of one another as family in Christ. As we struggle our way forward in the storms of our day, let us trust in God, and let us not accept the grace of God in vain, so wrapped up in battening down the hatches of our own boats that we get lost in ourselves. Jesus on the water invites us to cultivate an empathic faith, bearing witness to nothing less than the power of God almighty to break the chains of sin and death and bondage in our world, thereby freeing the whole creation and ushering in Love's reign of peace and freedom for all. That is what the church is about. What an awesome mystery.

May we look beyond the boat to see the sea and face the wind and waves with boldness, with empathy and with expectation. May we put our faith in the God who calms seas and breaks chains' and then put that faith to work as we participate in God's mission of setting this weary world free. Open wide your hearts. We will ride out the storm together and with God.

Amen.