

"Faith of Our Fathers"
The Third Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 7
Gail Sheddy - June 21, 2009

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Psalm 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

Happy Father's Day.

Commandment. Honor thy father...

Ad lib re: fathers in the congregation...

No one here has their father with us but that doesn't mean we don't honor them on Father's Day. We still appreciate the faith and trust they put in us and we in them.

Fortunate to have had them in our lives.

Faith. An interesting concept.

Because I am still learning how to preach and how to prepare a sermon to preach, I still struggle with exactly what I want to say and how I want to say it.

I pray. I listen. I look for truly what the spirit saying to the church
Sometimes I get it. And sometimes I don't.

One of the resources available to us these days is the use of the internet to come up with ideas for the sermon...the sharing of the good news as revealed in the lesson, the psalm, and the gospel of the day.

So I was surprised, when I consulted these resources, to find that many sermons I found focused on a message that I was not drawn to.

Many sermons talked about the stilling of the sea, the storms of life, the church being like a boat driven by the stormy seas, a boat tossed in the storms...and on and on and on. One location even showed me a famous painting by Rembrandt showing Jesus and his disciples in the boat with the sea raging titled Storms on the Sea of Galilee. Another had many pieces of art that show Jesus in the front of the boat asleep, his disciples in a state of panic, with the wind blowing and the water bringing up heavy waves. You get the picture.

Not many of these resources paid much attention to the questions Jesus asks his

disciples once he calms the storm. And it were those two questions that moved me.

The questions of WHY ARE YOU AFRAID and HAVE YOU STILL NO FAITH he wanted answers to.

And he didn't get any. Why?

Fear? Lack of Faith?

Maybe it would be easier to understand if we focus, again, on the scene...Jesus and the disciples in the boat. Storm comes up. Jesus is asleep. Disciples frightened that they will drown. Wakes Jesus and asks him if he does not care about them losing their lives.

Jesus responds. "Stills the sea." Dead calm. Miracle. Wow! And then he asks the questions for which no answers are given other than they were filled with awe .

Why didn't they answer the questions?

What would they have said?

"Well, Jesus, we are just getting to know you. We're still learning. We don't know how you react to these kind of "storms". We didn't know if you were aware that there was a possibility we could all lose our lives. And we wanted you to know. And care about us. And help us survive.

So you showed us how much you care by stilling the wind and waters. You calmed our fears. You gave us reason to renew our faith.

So we know better now to doubt you. We will put ourselves in your hands as true believers...faithful followers ...loyal supporters because you continue to amaze us with your abilities.

We're getting there."

When you think about it, I believe Jesus was a little tough on his disciples.

Why does Jesus find it necessary to chastise them when they turned to him for help?

Is he testing them?

He IS in the process of teaching them things...all sorts of things...and it would appear he uses many tactics to get his message across.

Maybe, this time, he puts them to the test to see if they've got it.

Unspoken are these thoughts...

"Believe. Believe in me. Don't be afraid. Have faith that I will, with my Father's help, take care of you. Trust me."

Still you wonder if he isn't putting them in this situation to test them...being too hard on them...expecting too much.

Probably the answer is that he wants them to experience the countless ways he and God, the Father will protect them...if only they believe.

And fear?

Fear is confronted in this story, but not by a sudden burst of courage or resolve on the part of the disciples. In the course of the storm, they never pull themselves together. They do not, at least not on their own, discover inner resources they did not know they had. Rather, it is Jesus who calms both them and the storm with the power of his presence. This gospel does not so much challenge us to discover forgotten courage in ourselves as it invites us to turn again to the Lord in times of trouble, turn to the one we trust to be more powerful than both Galilean storms and the storms that rage in our lives.

The story is about "faith". The disciples lack trust and confidence in Jesus and who he is, and in his authority and the source of that authority.

It is important to note that Jesus never says, "There is nothing to be afraid of." The Galilean storm was doubtless indeed fearsome as are the "wind and waves" that threaten us. Rather, Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" A good way to understand this distinction is to imagine a child who awakens in the dark of the night, terrified at some dream that has awakened the child, frightened of some phantom hiding in the bedroom closet. The mother rushes into the bedroom and scoops the little one into her arms and sits in a chair. She wipes sweaty locks off her child's forehead, caresses his hair, rocks her gently, and then she whispers what a thousand mothers have whispered since the beginning of time, "Hush now, there's nothing to be afraid of." The question these comforting words raise is simply this: "Is the mother telling the whole truth to her child? Is there really nothing to be afraid of?"

Although we often confuse them saying, "there's nothing to be afraid of" is a very different thing from saying, "do not be afraid." The hard truth is that fearsome things are very real: isolation, pain, illness, meaninglessness, rejection,

losing one's job, money problems, failure, illness, and death.

As we grow in faith, we come to understand that even though such fearsome things are very real, they do not have the last word. They do not have ultimate power over us, because reigning over this world of fearsome things is a God who is mightier than they.

Time and again in Scripture the word is, "Do not be afraid." It is, in a very real sense, the "first" and the "last" word of the gospel. It is the word the angels speak to the terrified shepherds and the word spoken at the tomb when the women discover it empty: "Do not be afraid." Not because there are no fearsome things on the "sea" of our lives, not because there are no storms, fierce winds, or waves, but rather, because God is with us.

Is our faith tested in our daily lives? Don't we have experiences that make us question if God is watching over us?

I think so.

And somehow, we rise to the challenge and demonstrate that, however things turn out, we believe...we trust...we have faith in God.

Instead of the mother comforting her child saying, "There's nothing to be afraid of," it would be better to say, "Don't be afraid, because you are not alone."

Even though there are real fearsome things in this life, they need not rock our boat;

We believe.

We trust.

We have faith.

We are not alone in the boat.

We have FAITH in our FATHER.

Happy Father's Day.