

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Book of Joshua.²

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith [SETH] my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

“Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

“And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD. And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of

rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.

“And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward [**REAR-wahrd**] came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward [**REAR-wahrd**] came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

“And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab [**RAY-hab**] the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that

ent fear and awe about Jesus, the God who walks with us each day. In the Na~~x~~me of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd Jeffrey Scott Johnson⁷
June 16, 2013

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Joshua 5:13—6:20 (KJV).

³ St. Mark 4:21-end (KJV).

⁴ St. Mark 4:35-41 (ESV).

⁵ St. Mark 4:39-41 (ESV).

⁶ St. John 1:1-3 (ESV).

⁷ Priest-in-Charge, All Saints Anglican Catholic Church, Saluda, VA.

He has the power to control nature just in his words. He speaks and nature obeys. What might He do to me?

In the stilling of the storm the disciples come to see more just who Jesus really is. He's not a mere man. He's not simply a good teacher and prophet with a special gift of healing. He is God wrapped in the flesh of a man. They are getting a glimpse of this, but still don't fully realize who Jesus is: that He is God. They have the appropriate reaction of fear and awe to be in the presence of God in the flesh who has the power of all creation in His spoken words. He spoke and separated the firmament of heaven in the beginning. Now He speaks and the waters obey.

I'd like to read the beginning of the Gospel of John inserting the name of Jesus where it belongs: "In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Jesus, and without Jesus was not any thing made that was made."⁶

Because Jesus is God, when He spoke the storm didn't just start to calm down or with winds start to blow slower, the storm instantly ceased. He alone has that authority and power.

Conclusion:

The lesson for us from this experience of the disciples isn't about Jesus fixing problems in our lives, or storms in our lives. Certainly God is in the midst of our storms, too. But what we really need to take from this is a deeper understanding of who Jesus really is. Like the disciples who asked, "Who is this?", we need to ask the same question, who is Jesus, who is this who says He is in me through His Holy Spirit and the Holy Communion? He wants to transform our understanding of who He is by showing His power in our lives. He is in us. His power is in us. He is truly God in us and walking with us in all situations and all circumstances. May we have the same rever-

the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.³

"And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

"And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith [SETH] unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were

also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

When I was growing up as a kid, I learned about certain parts of town you didn't want to go in. As I look back, it is amazing how an elementary school age child can learn about the darker side of places. We just "knew" you didn't go to the South Side of town or even parts of the East Side. If you weren't from those parts of town and showed up, you were asking for trouble. They were dangerous parts of town; at least dangerous for me. There was a certain aura about it in the stories we would hear.

We also heard stories about evil and scary things that would make your skin crawl. I remember being on a Cub Scout trip and hearing about the "donkey lady". The legend of the donkey lady was she was an evil woman who rode about on a donkey. Of course she lived in the woods not too far from where we were that night. So the horror of possibly going out in the night away from the camp fire and catching a glimpse of the donkey lady was a bit unnerving. It could even be terrifying for some if the story was embellished just right. Of course when I was older, I became pretty good at telling the story of donkey lady and really scaring younger kids, but even though I knew it was just a legend, the possibility that it just might be true was in the back of my mind when I was out in the woods.

was to them a great prophet and teacher. The storm was about to teach them how wrong they were and who He really is.

Reading again from St. Mark 4, verse 39, "And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"⁵

It is important to note what really happens here and the disciples' reaction. This is not a case of Jesus starting to pray about the situation and asking God to intervene, then the winds start to slow down and the waves begin to gradually get smaller and smaller and over a period of five minutes the sea goes from having huge swells to just being a bit choppy. It didn't happen that way at all. It was not gradual and it was not natural.

Jesus spoke the words, "Peace! Be still!" The Greek words here used by Jesus are hard to translate. The first word is akin to Archie Bunker saying, "Stifle yourself, Edith!" Another way of saying it might be "put a muzzle on it". And the word for "be still" has a connotation of the stillness of death, completely still. Jesus commands the inanimate objects of wind and water to stop and be completely calm, and they do. The impact of this immediate change of sea state is so strong to the disciples it is very unsettling and throws them completely off balance.

They were filled with great fear. It wasn't a thrill or fun or exciting for them to see the ocean go from a raging, chaotic death trap to a completely flat, smooth, calm sea. It wasn't like what we experience watching "Deadliest Catch" or some reality TV show. Instead of their whooping it up and cheering and saying "wow wasn't that cool!", they were filled with great fear and said to each other, "Who is this guy that the wind and water obey him?" I think they were afraid to be in the boat with Him.

ciples, the storms in their journey across the sin most likely brought to them thoughts that they were wrong to be heading to the other side of the sea towards the sinful people. They may have had thoughts saying, “I knew it was wrong to be heading to the other side and now God is punishing us for going the wrong direction. The demons from the other side are getting us before we even get there!”

Even though the disciples and especially the Twelve Apostles had seen miracles of healing and demons being cast out, and even though they thought Jesus was the Messiah who would bring real change to the condition of Israel, they really didn’t have a clue about who Jesus really is.

In their moment of stress and panic, when they think they are going to die and see Jesus sleeping at the back of the boat, they go wake Him up and say, “Don’t you even care that we’re about to die?” Do you see what is in this question? Don’t you care what I’m going through?

Is this not what we ask God in the midst of our storms and stress? We wonder if God really cares. How could a loving and caring God allow this to happen? The disciples are saying, How can he be sleeping when we’re about to go under? Why did He bring us to the other side just to die in a storm because we’re heading to where all the sinners live? How could He lead us into a dangerous place, doesn’t He even care?

In the same way, we wonder why God allows things in our lives, why the pain and suffering, why life can be so hard some times, why, why, why doesn’t God seem to care?

In the storms of life is when we see who we are and what we really believe, and most importantly who we really believe Jesus is. The disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah. They thought they had the true leader of another revolution, a man anointed by God with special gifts like a great prophet. He

Legends, reputations about evil things spread well and sink into our psyche in a very powerful way. We carry them around for a long time, maybe even for life. I say all of this by way of setting up what I’d like to talk about this morning. When Jesus walked the earth there were areas in Palestine that had a reputation like the South Side of town if you will, only worse. The East Side of the Sea of Galilee was such a place. It was an area of ten cities spread across a fairly wide area known as the Decapolis.

The Decapolis to the Jews was synonymous with decadence and evil. It was a Gentile region settled by Greek warriors who came with Alexander the Great on his conquests some three hundred years before Christ. Just as Alexander the Great wanted to conquer the world and spread Greek culture, because he thought it superior to every other culture, the people of the Decapolis were devoted to Greek ideals, to the Greek gods, customs, and practices. After a hundred years or so of living under the influence and pressure to become Greek, the Jewish Maccabean revolt was in large part a reaction to the attempts of the Greeks to convert the Jews to their beliefs, to change the Jewish way of life to a Hellenized life.

The Maccabees overthrew the Greek rulers and went back to serving God and living with their own laws and customs. When Roman soldiers came the people in the Decapolis were relieved to have the Romans bring back their old way of life and set them free from the crazy Jewish people who only worshiped one God. The Greek swine herders, Greek and Roman gods, temple prostitutes, competing naked in athletic games, the erotic drama in the theaters, all returned to the lives of the Decapolis, the ten cities under the free Roman rule. The human body was glorified as the epitome of creation. The societies were filled with temple ceremonies, sacrifices with pigs, violence, wealth, and the glorification of sexuality. (Some of this might seem eerily familiar to us as our society worships the youthful body, sex, and wealth.)

To the Jews living on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the Decapolis was a place you just didn't go. It was full of sin and decadence. To go there meant becoming unclean and being exposed to the demonic activity surrounding the culture enthralled with worshiping the creation of the human body and sexuality instead of the True God who made all the universe. To a Pharisee, the idea of setting foot on land on the Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was just unthinkable. This then is the setting.

Jesus has started His ministry, has been healing, casting out demons, and teaching in Galilee—on the western side. In the first three chapters of the Gospel of St. Mark, He heals everyone coming to Him. His reputation is spreading so much that vast crowds are beginning to gather and follow Him; so much so that men tear open the roof of a house to let down their crippled friend to be healed. Jesus teaches in the local synagogues and heals on the Sabbath to the amazement of the Pharisees to that they are now looking for ways to destroy Him even as He is just starting on His ministry. In chapter three of St. Mark, Jesus calls out the twelve Apostles and gives them authority and power to heal sickness and to cast out demons. Then in Chapter four there are so many people gathered, Jesus asks Peter to get one of his boats so He can sit in the boat on the shore and teach the vast crowd. He teaches parables about the kingdom of heaven, the deceitfulness of riches, and serving others out of love. At the end of this teaching the crowd is sent away and Jesus says let's go to the other side of the Sea.

Can you imagine what must have gone through their minds? What on earth is this guy thinking? Why would we go to the other side? Here we are on the right side of the sea and Jesus wants us to go to the Decapolis? How can it possibly please God for us to go to an unclean place? Those people over there are sick, sinners, devil worshipers, full of demons. What about the legendary man in chains who is so full of demons no one can contain him? What if we get attacked by demons?

What if we get attacked by the Gentile heathens; do we have enough swords? Scripture does not record these thoughts, but based on experience we can imagine the disciples were having all kinds of second thoughts about going to the other side of the sea.

Reading from the Gospel of St. Mark:

“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side’ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”⁴

Remember these men with their boats were professional fishermen. They knew the Sea of Galilee very well, having spent days and years of their lives on the sea fishing and living. For them to be afraid of the sea and a storm on the sea says a lot. The storm must have been incredibly bad with high winds and great waves. The waves were beating against the boat so much it was taking on water and they thought they were going to be swamped and sink.

I learned recently from a Focus on the Family program called That the World May Know, that to the Jewish mind set of the time of Christ, storms on the water were a sign of the anger of God and a reflection of sin. This goes back to the idea of creation and the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters at the time of creation and bringing order out of chaos. To the Jews, chaos is sign of sin and order is a sign of righteousness. So to the dis-