

Sermon
4 Pentecost—7-B
St. Andrew's, Methuen
June 20, 2021
William Bradbury

Job 38:1-11
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

Recently Stephanie and I watched a four-part documentary on Netflix called "This is a Robbery", about the art heist at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the early hours of March 18, 1990. The FBI values the 13 items stolen at \$500 million.

One of the most famous is Rembrandt's "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee", which of course I've never seen in person because when I first visited this fabulous museum in 2007 all I saw was its empty frame.

But as they showed it in the documentary I was overwhelmed with the painting. I had always imagined that storm to be a relatively mild affair with small whitecaps.

What Rembrandt gives us, however, is a ship in the grasp of enormous waves and white spray. Five of the disciples are in the bow fighting to trim the sails or just holding on, and several are in the stern frozen in fear, one is tending the rudder, one is praying, two are speaking with Jesus, and one poor soul is vomiting over the side of the boat.

Jesus looks like a man awakened from deep sleep.

=====

There are two obvious miracles in this story today—and I wonder, if you could choose to have such a power—which power you would want for yourself?

Would you like to be able to calm the storm?

There have been times I've wished for this power: usually when I'm playing tennis.

But I really don't want the power to control the weather because I'm not smart enough. I don't want to save my game while killing somebody's corn.

Clergy often get asked jokingly to do something about the weather but my standard line is, "I'm in sales, not management."

I would very much like to have the power of the other miracle: **the ability to sleep in the middle of a storm.**

I sleep great when the storm is outside and I'm inside in a dry bed.

But it is much harder to sleep in the middle of a mindstorm. A **brainstorm** is a creative, energizing event, but a **mindstorm** is a miserable experience at 3AM when fearful thoughts threaten to drown us.

To have the ability to sleep through a mindstorm, or better yet, not to have mindstorms in the first place--now that would be heaven on earth!

I know I'm not alone in thinking this: according to a report several years ago:

- People today sleep 20% less than they did 100 years ago.
- More than 30% of the population suffers from insomnia.
- More than half of Americans lose sleep due to stress and/or anxiety—that is, mindstorms.
- Women are up to twice as likely to suffer from insomnia than men.

So, can Jesus teach us to find peace in the middle of our internal storms?

Jesus says to us his panicked disciples: **"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"**

I used to hear these questions as rebukes, but maybe Jesus really wants us to think about why we are afraid and what is the status of our faith.

Why are we afraid?

We are afraid of ending up like Job: our children dead, our health and wealth gone, surrounded by so-called friends **who tell us it's all our fault.**

We are afraid of ending up like Apostle Paul who tells us today about his "afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger...."

Often mindstorms are about lesser things—an argument, a vague pain, or the steady decline of our strength and looks.

In short, we're afraid the storms of life will overwhelm us.

Which raises the second question: Have you no faith?

In the modern church most of us have been taught to have belief, not faith. This belief is a mental assent to the teachings of the

Church. Unfortunately, too **often we are not taught how to turn cold belief into warm faith, which is the ability to trust God enough to make a real difference in our lives.**

Faith is not certainty about the future but trust in the One who holds all things in love, including the future.

The reason Jesus can sleep in the middle of the storm is not that he has no concern for his physical wellbeing: He asks the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink of water; he enjoys parties with wine, food, and friends; he takes naps when he is tired.

Nor is Jesus convinced nothing bad will ever happen to him

He knows better! He'll be murdered soon enough.

But protecting his physical life is not his top priority.

Neither is protecting his social wellbeing, his reputation, his top priority. In fact, he regularly does things that make damages his reputation.

So, what is his highest concern if it isn't his physical safety or personal success?

Jesus' highest concern is living into his communion with the Divine.

That's why he tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God..." That is, to make God's companionship our top priority.

Of course, this only works when Divine Reality is real to us. At the time of the storm the apostles are not sufficiently aware of God's presence holding them, but they are sufficiently aware that God is present in Jesus, so they wake up Jesus.

Who do you turn to when the waves start coming into the boat?

Do you focus on the mindstorm, trying to fix it by more thinking—which only has the effect of making the mindstorm stronger.

Or do we, consciously and consistently turn to Christ?

Only Christ can calm the storms in our minds and give us enough peace of mind to make the best decisions in navigating our lives.

The question for us isn't how to stay safe, but how to stay faithful!

I want to suggest that we stay faithful by **imagining**—in everything we do—the presence of Jesus Christ with us and in us.

As you well know, this requires a lifetime of imagination practice, which is a form of prayer.

Rembrandt imagines this scene and puts it on canvas. We imagine this scene and put it in the heart.

But notice: Rembrandt imagines one thing not in the story: He imagines himself in the boat. Art historians tell us that the one guy looking directly at us is Rembrandt himself.

We have all been given the power to imagine Christ with us. And when we do the wind and waves often calm down. Other times the storm rages on, but now Christ calms us and gives us peace in the midst of the storm.

Either way we will know what 14th century mystic Lady Julian of Norwich says:

"Jesus did not say, 'You will never have a rough passage, you will never be over-strained, you will never feel uncomfortable,' but he did say, 'You will never be overcome.'