

SERMON, Sunday, August 7, 2011

The Rev. Joe Clark

Matthew 14:22-33

THIS GOSPEL STORY OF JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER IS FOUND ONLY IN MATTHEW...MARK HAS JESUS IN A STORM, THERE IS A BRIEF BIT ABOUT THIS IN JOHN AND IT IS NOT MENTIONED IN LUKE.


---STORMS HAVE A WAY OF JOLTING OUR RATIONAL, MANAGABLE WORLD IN A WAY THAT CAN OFTEN TURN THINGS UPSIDE DOWN.

LAST FRIDAY MORNING ON NPR, THERE WAS A BRILLIANT PIECE ABOUT THE TORNADO IN JOPLIN, MISSOURI WHICH DESTROYED 1/3 OF THE CITY.

THE STORY TOLD OF SOME PEOPLE WHO WERE COLLECTING THE DAMAGED GOODS... MONUMENT

ONE MAN IN PARTICULAR, TOLD OF KEEPING SOME BROKEN PICTURE FRAMES AND HANGING IN THE BASEMENT TO KEEP AS A REMINDER OF THE DAY AND THE LESSONS IT HAS TAUGHT HIM. LISTENING TO THE STORY, I HAD THE SENSE THAT FOR A NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN JOPLIN MISSOURI, THE EVENTS THAT DAY HAD A WAY OF OPENING DOORS AND WINDOWS OF THEIR LIVES NOT JUST LITERALLY BUT EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.

...SOMETIMES EVENTS TURN OUR NICELY MANAGED, RATIONAL AND PREDICTABLE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN AND THINGS CAN COME APART IN A WAY WE DIDN'T EXPECT.

 IT FEELS LIKE STEPPING OFF FIRM GROUND INTO DEEP WATERS THAT WILL BECOME A STORM

--STORMY WEATHER IWRAPS IT'S ARMS AROUND US WHENCANCER, LAID OFF, MARRIAGE ENDS OR THE PHONE CALL COMES,

WHEN WALL STREET PLUMMETS 500 POINTS AND RETIREMENT HOPES FALL.

WHEN WAVES BEAT ON THE SIDE OF THE BOAT AND WE ARE BEING SWAMPED BY WATERS OF BROKEN PROMISES AND SHATTERED DREAMS, WE GET SCARED.

--- WE CRY OUT, LIKE THE DISCIPLES IN THIS MORNING'S GOSPEL, CRY OUT OF FEAR. SOMETIMES IT MEANS PRAYING IN DESPIRATION, TELLING ANOTHER THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR LIFE, BEING HONEST WITH THE THERAPIST FOR THE FIRST TIME, ADMITTING " I AM AFRAID" LIKE PETER, "LORD SAVE ME"

THE DISCIPLES ARE TAKING THE BOAT TO THE OTHER SIDE, IT IS EVENING AND THEY ARE FAR FROM LAND, THE WIND WAS AGAINST THEM. SMELL THE SEA, IMAGINE YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE DISCIPLES ON THE BOAT.

THE WIND PICKS UP, THE SKY DARKENS AND THE WAVES BEGIN TO BEAT ON THE SIDE OF THE BOAT. YOU ARE AFRAID AND SOME TIME NEAR DAY BREAK, YOU SEE JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER TOWARD THE BOAT. THEY ARE AFRAID AND PETER BEGINS TO WALK ON THE WATER TOWARD JESUS. BUT THE WIND IS SO STRONG IT FREIGHTENS PETER. JESUS CATCHES PETER AND ASKS WHY DID HE DOUBT. THEY GET INTO THE BOAT AND THE WIND CALMS DOWN AND THINGS RETURN TO NORMAL.

WHAT IS IT THAT CAUSES US SUCH FEAR IN THE STORMS OF LIFE?

BEFORE YOU FALL ASLEEP TONIGHT, AFTER YOU TURN OUT THE LIGHTS, LOOK AROUND AND OUT TO THE HORIZON WHERE A NEW STORM MAY BE APPROACHING AND THREATENING YOUR OWN SMALL BOAT – BE IT YOUR MARRIAGE OR CAREER OR RETIREMENT OR GROWING OLD OR YOUR ANXIETIES DURING THE DAY AND DREAMS IN THE NIGHT. .. CONSIDER WHAT YOU HAVE WITHIN YOURSELF THAT MIGHT CALM THE SEA AND CAUSE THE WIND TO BE CALM.

A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE TOLD OF A DOCTOR WHO WAS DYING OF CANCER

HARDEST TIMES WERE WHEN HE WENT BRIEFLY INTO REMISSION. HE FORGOT WHAT HAD BEEN IMPORTANT TO HIM WHEN HE WAS DEALING WITH THE CANCER...HE BEGAN TO THINK THAT MAYBE HE WASN'T DYING.

...HE HAD FOUND A DEPTH IN LIFE THAT HAD ESCAPED HIM UNTIL THE CANCER.

... I HAVE BEEN HAUNTED BY THE STORY OF THE FOLKS IN JOPLIN MISSOURI THAT THEY WERE CAUTIOUS ABOUT GOING BACK TO THE OLD WAYS AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED. THE STORM ENDED, THE SEAS QUIET, THE WIND IS CALM, MY FEARS ARE BEHIND ME AND THINGS WERE SAFE. THEY WERE AWARE, I THINK, THAT IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THAT DESTRUCTION WAS THEIR DISCOVERY OF SOMETHING NEW ABOUT LIFE AND ITS STORMS WHICH TAUGHT THEM PRECIOUS UNDERSTANDINGS OF WHAT TO HOLD ON TO AND WHAT TO LET GO OF.

STORMS ARE PART OF EVERY LIFE. AND ALL OUR BOATS ARE SMALL. WHAT JESUS REMINDS THE DISCIPLES AND EVEN US, IS THAT WATERS THREATENING TO DROWN US BRING US A KIND OF HEALING FAITH THAT CAN DELIVER US IN WAYS WE NEVER IMAGINED.

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG ABOUT CRYING OUT AND REACHING FOR A SPOUSE, PARENT OR CLERGY OR EVEN GOING TO BED OR ESCAPING IN OTHER WAYS THAT MIGHT CALM THE STORM AND QUIET OUR FEARS. IT IS ONLY THAT OUR USUAL WAYS OF GETTING THROUGH THE STORMS TAKE AWAY FROM US THE CHANCE OF LEARNING WHAT ONLY STORMS CAN TEACH US : HOLDING THE FEARS AND RIDING THE WAVES ARE THE WAY TO GROW UP AND WE HAVE A CHANCE TO EMBRACE THE SAME SPIRIT THAT JESUS OFFERED AND CAN BRING US NEW LIFE..

--- THERE HAVE BEEN MANY PHARASIES SERMONISING ABOUT THE CATASTROPHY OF 9/11 AND HOW IT AFFECTED OUR NATION.

IT IS A POPULAR ICON THIS THE TENTH YEAR SINCE IT HAPPENED AND FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE WILL USE IT TO GAIN ADVANTAGE FOR THEIR POLITICAL PURPOSES.

BUT FOR THE TRUTH, WE SHOULD LOOK TO ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SAW THAT DEATH WAS NEAR AND WHO CALLED HOME ON THEIR CELL PHONES. AND EXPRESSED NOT ANGER OR FEAR, BITTERNESS OR RESENTMENT BUT SIMPLY TO SAY "I LOVE YOU, TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN, HAVE A GOOD LIFE."

IN A MOMENT OF GREAT CLARITY AT THE END THEY CALLED IN THE MIDST OF SMOKE AND CONFUSION AND PANIC, TO GIVE US THEIR BENEDICTION " I LOVE YOU, TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN, HAVE A GOOD LIFE"

AND WE SHOULD ACCEPT IT.

AND GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULLNESS. AND BESEECH HIM THAT WE MAY HAVE A QUIET AND PEACEFUL LIFE IN ALL GODLINESS AND DIGNITY. AND THAT IN EVERY PLACE, MEN AND WOMEN SHOULD LIFT UP THEIR HANDS IN PRAYER WITHOUT ANGER OR ARGUMENT. AMEN