

On to the Other Side

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash

September 25, 2022

Job 28, selected verses (Inclusive Bible)

Where does one find wisdom? Where is the place of understanding? **21**It is hidden from the eyes of the living; it is hidden from the birds of the air....**23**only God knows how to get there; for God is where it is. **24**For the Most High looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under heaven all at once. **25**When God gave wind its movement, and measured the breadth and depth of the waters, **26**and made the rules for rain and designed paths for lightning, **27**God beheld wisdom and named it, confirmed it and tested it.

Luke 8: 22-25 (NRSV)

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, **23** and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. **24** They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And waking up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. **25** Then he said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were terrified and amazed and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?”

Prayer

Sermon

Have you noticed that Jesus was always crossing this sea -
Always making his way to the other side?
Without letting fear of what he would find in the land of the Gerasenes
cause him to pause,
And without wondering about the kind of sudden storm that came up so
often on the Sea of Galilee.
Jesus was always crossing this sea.
You might remember the passage we studied two weeks ago, the story of
Jesus setting out into the middle of this same body of water, with the
fishermen who would become fishers of people.
After a night when they caught nothing,
Jesus jumped into their boat and told them to cast their nets again into the
water,
And up came hundreds of fish,
Enough for them, and their families, and their neighbors.
They began to fish for people,
They became disciples.

And in today's story, it was their turn to cross the sea with Jesus. To go on
to the other side.

Jesus could see the direction they needed to go,
And was not dissuaded by scarcity or storm.

But Jesus' disciples were another story.
They were in the boat with him,
But when the storm arose,
They *were* frightened.
Jesus was asleep in the boat,

"A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water,
and they were in danger."

And *the disciples were* scared.

—

Are you scared? Are there storms in this world that scare you, that cause you to cry out, *Lord we are perishing?!?*

This could of course be the metaphorical storms of life - illness, hardship, grief. Or, the storms that impact our human community - economic disparity, homophobia, racial injustice.

But the storms I'm thinking of, as we observe a season of creation and as we continue to ask, how will Pilgrim respond to climate change - the storms I'm thinking of are literal storms today.

The storms that surge up the Atlantic, flooding from Puerto Rico to Nova Scotia.

The floods that covered Pakistan¹ and the floods that covered Kentucky and Mississippi.

These are frightening times we are living through. The impacts of climate change are no longer in the future. They are happening today, and they are happening all around us. The storms have swept in, and our boat is filling with water.

I have heard from many of you that these storms have you up at night, worrying for your neighbors and grieving for the next generation. In the great Biblical tradition of lament, we acknowledge the pain, grief, disruption, dismay of the climate crisis. When we open our eyes to this crisis, our hearts break.²

The disciples found themselves in a boat filling with water. I imagine that they started baling as fast as they could. Perhaps with rains falling they watched for land. Someone surely grabbed the oars and started pumping.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/floods-united-nations-general-assembly-trending-news-climate-and-environment-9cc68f04a5df732d067a772a62327252>

² I am grateful to Margaret Bullitt-Jonas for the framing "Awakened heart, broken heart, radiant heart" in Andrea Cohen-Kiener. *Claiming Earth As Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis Through the Lens of Faith* (p. 135-137). Kindle Edition.

What is it that we do when we realize we're in trouble? We research (especially this particular congregation of scientists). We do what we can. And we look for help.

The disciples did not know what to do.

So they called out to Jesus.

“They went to him and woke him up, shouting, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’”

And Jesus calmed the storm.

I love this passage because it has a word for us whenever we are in the midst of a storm. Though in these days we don't expect Jesus to show up and literally cause the flood waters to recede, there is still a good word for us.

Jesus asked his followers, “Where is your faith?”

Did Jesus mean, where is your belief? Why do you have doubts? With Fred Craddock, I think Jesus meant something a little different. I think the good word for his disciples on that stormy night and the good word for us today is that Jesus expects of us courage and determination in the face of fear.³ And Jesus was right there to offer strength.

Good news. Jesus was in the boat.

One thing I know - when Jesus is in the boat with us, there is always a new day. A new dawn. Love like an ocean, love moving through us and into the world in waves.

³ Craddock, Luke: Interpretation commentary series.

This is the promise of the Christian faith: when storms come, we are not alone. There is always hope. And we are not meant to be self-sufficient. We are meant to be part of something far greater than ourselves.

There is a Christian biblical interpreter, Sunday School teacher and climate activist - Bill McKibben - who says it this way:

“As people of faith, we believe that if we do all that we can, something beyond us will meet us part way.”⁴

Relying on Jesus’ strength, relying on God’s wisdom, we will not be deterred. From a flooded boat, we keep paddling. We will get on to the other side.

Do you know, Pilgrims, that this congregation has been responding to climate change for a long time? We have greened our building, we have harvested at the interfaith garden, we have signed (non-partisan) climate voter pledges, we have shown up when Lexington High School students asked us to rally with them for climate justice, and our individual actions are so many.

This spring, we felt a resurgence of passion and commitment. Over 20 people participated in conversations and film screenings as well as some hands on activities from gardening to the interfaith and non-partisan pledge to be climate voters. But still we are yearning to do more.

For a long time, some Pilgrims have hoped that solar panels could be part of our response to climate change but in years past it was not possible. Just in the last few weeks we've discovered new possibilities and we've had very preliminary conversations about solar panels that would both meet our electricity needs and maybe also help some neighbors. Think about how exciting that would be! So we're starting to dream, we're

⁴ Bill McKibben, September 11, 2022, Hancock Church UCC

starting to hope, about a significant and concrete step we might take together. This is like what we do in autumn - planting bulbs that may flower in the spring. We don't have details yet - but we hope you'll start dreaming and hoping with us as we explore this new possibility in the next year - and pray for the folks who are researching this on our behalf. Speaking of whom - let me make a particular nod to Dave McClave who's kept up with all of this over the years.

This very local new possibility comes around the same time as some very tangible steps moves on the state, regional, national and international levels. Renewable energy is getting more practical and more affordable. Congress has acted in substantive ways. The northeastern states have ambitious goals for renewable energy. Internationally, the US has ratified a global treaty to end HFC production.⁵ We literally have all the technology we need to cut greenhouse gases and convert to renewable energy, if we have a common commitment. Y'all, this is good news. Our boat is still filling with water - but this summer it started to feel, for the first time in a long time, like the storm was abating just a little bit.

God beheld wisdom and named it, confirmed it and tested it.

And we are on our way, on to the other side, with Jesus in the boat with us.

So, let us take up the courage and faith and Love that our creator offers to us in the midst of this stormy sea. Fear should not keep us from crossing on to the other side. There is work to be done. There is an ocean of love to be shared. Amen.

⁵ https://www.npr.org/2022/09/20/1123433566/hydrofluorocarbons-banned-us?fbclid=IwAR0AkwLVmXd-MR6_iBRnxkbu3PFeyKVARgwSilaEB1h5hIRBN0tQlvkJBE8