

Pentecost II (Propers 7) RCL Yr. B  
June 21, 2009

St. Margaret's  
Annapolis

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.  
*Amen.*

*"A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped."* [from Mark 4:35-41]

There must be few things more terrifying than a storm at sea. Thunder, wind, lightening... even small bodies of water have the power of life and death.

When I was a girl, just twelve or thirteen, I had just a taste of such a thing. A group of us were on a church outing at a small public lake. There was a little amusement park, food concessions, a boat rental, and a bit of beach. Two or three of us girls got out on the lake in a small sailboat. It was great fun. Just enough breeze to scoot around the lake, taking back and forth. We thought we were really something!

Then, before we knew what was happening, a sudden squall came up. The sky turned black, the wind bore down on us, and the sky opened up in a torrent. We had no oars, so we tried to tack our way back to shore. But nothing worked. We were out there on the water in that storm, and I was truly terrified.

It seemed to go on forever, but in reality, it probably only lasted ten or fifteen minutes; an eternity. Then, as suddenly as it began, the storm abated. The skies cleared, the wind died down, the waters became smooth again. I couldn't have been more relieved if Jesus himself had been there to calm the waters!

And he said to them, *"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

Well, there are storms, and then there are storms of another sort.

It is surely a storm when the calm waters of our lives are disrupted by some sudden, unpredictable event; some change of fortune, some unexpected news, something that seems to threaten everything. The very foundation of our safe and predictable lives is shaken. Control has been an illusion, and we know ourselves to be at the mercy of elements we did not see coming and we cannot command.

There are storms, and then there are storms of another sort.

The job we thought was secure. The pension we believed was safe. The person we thought we could count on. The loved one we expected to always be there. The house we thought we stand forever. The patterns of our lives we never in a million years imagined could or would change. The solid ground falling out from under us,

whatever that solid ground might be: the earth itself, or the way we thought things would always be.

It is at just such times – when we are about to sink, and all looks lost – it is at just such times that we cry out to God. *“Oh, God! Help me!”* or *“Save me, Lord. I am about to sink!”*

Frederick Buechner, Presbyterian minister and author, writes about this very moment. “Recognized or unrecognized,” he says, “Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and... we may in whatever way we can call on him as the fishermen did in their boat to come awake within us and to give us courage, to give us hope, to show us, each one, our way... especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we’re done, so that even in their midst we may find peace, find him.”

I don’t know what his voice will sound like to you; whether you will actually hear those comforting words: “Why are you afraid?” Or whether it will be something less obvious. I think sometimes we aren’t aware of God’s presence in the midst of the storm. But God is there. I’ve been through enough of them in my life now to know: even if I don’t recognize it at the time, God is there, if not to calm the waves, to at least ride it out with me.

I don’t know much, but I know this: that God is with us in the worst of it; that sometimes we can’t see it until much later. And there’s more: that if we’ll allow it, if we’ll open ourselves to it, God will not only give us peace, give us the calm after the storm, but will bless and redeem the damage. God will take the wreckage and make of it a new and seaworthy boat for us.

I’m a big fan of Itzhak Perlman, the great violinist. Someone sent me this story about him many years ago, and have been saving it for just the right occasion. Maybe this is it. Maybe this will speak to you today. I hope so. It’s about a concert he gave on November 18, 1995.

Perlman came on stage at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. If you have ever been to a Perlman concert, you know that getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with polio as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches. To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is an unforgettable sight.

He walks painfully, yet majestically, until he reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly, puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and proceeds to play.

By now, the audience is used to this ritual. They sit quietly while he makes his way across the stage to his chair. They remain reverently silent... until he is ready to play.

But this time, something went wrong. Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap – it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant.

There was no mistaking what he had to do. People who were there that night thought to themselves... that he would have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage – to either find another violin or else find another string for his. But he didn't.

Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra began, and he played from where he had left off. And he played with such passion and such power and such purity as they had never heard before.

Of course, everyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings... but that night, Perlman refused to know that. You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was detuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. There was an extraordinary outburst of applause from every corner of the auditorium.

[People] were on their feet, screaming and cheering, doing everything they could to show how much they appreciated what he had done.

He smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet the crowd, and then he said, not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone: "You know, sometime it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."<sup>ii</sup>

"[Jesus] woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'"  
Whatever your storm, God in Christ Jesus will see you through. God in Christ Jesus will help you make music with what you have left.

Amen.

The Reverend Lori M. Lowe

---

<sup>i</sup> Frederick Buechner, "Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons," p. 297

<sup>ii</sup> Jack Riemer, Houston Chronicle