

Sermon: Pentecost 4

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 21, 2015

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

When I was in elementary school... I learned... as I'm sure many of you did... to color... and when we did... it was almost always... with something like this... we were taught... we learned... to stay within the lines... it taught us order... boundaries... and control...

There is also art that extends beyond intended... or expected borders... there are artists... who when given a defined canvas... choose to break boundaries and move beyond it... for some viewers... this creates chaos... they think the artist has violated sensible boundaries and lost control...

And it's from of an out-of-control whirlwind... that God answers Job's questions... which themselves come out of his understanding of how things work... the righteous are rewarded... and sinners are punished... but Job has lived a righteous life... according to all he's learned about how things work... according to the framework from which he functions... he does not deserve the fate which has befallen him... Job knows that he has not sinned or disobeyed God... yet chaos has come knocking at his door...

Theologian Leanne Pearce Reed writes: Job still thinks of the world in legal terms of right and wrong... it's the only thing left standing between him and the chaos of the world... and even though this legal theory has failed him... he is still irrationally desperate for justice to prevail... and so he has it out with God...

And in a fierce... but beautiful... poetic litany... God describes the works of creation... from the birth of the seas to the movements of the constellations... from the patterns of

wind and rain to the customs of wild creatures... we don't hear all of it... God's answer is four chapters long... but there is one thing that Job hasn't considered... the ways of the universe are unfathomable... creation is too big... and Job's framework is too small...

God tells Job... you think in terms of the court room... I think in terms of the cosmos... your human theories cannot possibly capture my complexity... and as surely as crocodiles roam the Nile... chaos is part of creation...

But we dislike chaos... chaos means that things are happening outside of our control... we try to keep it at bay... we exert great energy battling disorder... and we dislike having a framework that's too small... we want our framework... our perspective... to be... well... bigger than it can be...

And even so... in my own limited framework... I sometimes lie in bed at night... trying to figure out how to either fix something... or keep it from breaking... when there's really nothing at all I can do in that moment... when I may not have all the information... when the best thing to do... is let go... and get the sleep I need...

So what do we do about chaos... do we know when our frameworks fail... and are we any better prepared for God's answer... than Job was...

Jesus continued to share God's answer last week... in parables about the Kingdom of God... in parables of reversal... and in parables of absence... where the least will be great and the first will be last... where the mustard seed... not quite the smallest of seeds... has become a bush large enough to house birds... and where the sower had a more hands-off approach... he simply did all that he could... and then went away to sleep and rise day and night... letting the seeds take care of themselves... and returned only when it was time for the harvest...

At the beginning of Chapter four in Mark... Jesus got into a boat and went a little ways off-shore... to be sure his voice would carry... but now... today... in the same boat... in a reversal... his voice is powerful enough to calm the wind and the sea... Jesus spoke to the Word to the crowds in parables... as *they* were able to hear it... but he explained everything to his disciples in private... they ought to have known...

Let's remember that we tend to take literally... many of the stories that ancient people told symbolically...

And so when evening had come... when the unfamiliar descended on them... Jesus said to his disciples... *Let us go across to the other side*... and they took him into their boat... taking him into their boat means that this was their adventure... their framework... it was their inner journey of discovery... and taking him *just as he was* means that their adventure will incorporate his teachings... Jesus won't water down what he's all about... or what he's explained to them in private...but as they journeyed from fear to faith... an inner storm arose... they experienced chaos around them... it may have seemed as though God was *drawing outside of the lines*... water belongs in the sea and not in the boat... and it overwhelmed them... as it did Job... and even though Jesus explained everything... they were not ready to get to the shoreline of faith on their own...

Theologian Justo González is empathetic: even in some of the smallest actions and the most common situations of daily life... we too are afraid... we wonder what will happen whatever the problem might be... we are convinced that we must solve it now... we cannot wait for the seed to mature or bear fruit... we cry urgently to a God who seems to be asleep... even when our boat is about to sink...

But the most powerful miracles are the ones that happen here [point to heart] inside us... and in learning to trust... that why Jesus asks them... *Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*... but they side-step the question... and avoid an answer... they're

unable to look inside and name their collective... or individual fear... they need to uncover the seeds each day and see if they're growing... and the disciples... instead of answering Jesus... change the subject... and ask themselves... who is this man who can remain calm and centered and grounded and in control of himself... even when the *most chaotic* storms of life are swirling around him...

On Wednesday evening... in Charleston, S.C... nine African American lives were taken... ended... in a hate crime of enormous magnitude... it was perpetrated by a man who was not centered or grounded... who could not contain the storm within himself...

The boundaries of faith... were violated by a whirlwind of fear... and his white supremacist inner chaos was fed... nourished... encouraged by our nation's systemic racism... by a Confederate flag that flies over S.C.'s statehouse... by streets named after Confederate Generals who fought to keep black people from driving on those streets... somewhere along the line... he must have witnessed fingers being pointed... it's what he learned... and he must have pointed mental fingers... making others responsible for what was going on inside of himself... making others responsible for what he perceived outside of himself... and there were television newscasters last week who claimed that this is an attack on Christianity... there was an African American minister on this show who said that pastors ought to come to church with guns to protect their flocks... I guess they didn't know that the shooter would say that he wanted to start a race war...

Like the disciples... and many of us... this misguided young man was unable to travel from the shoreline of fear to the shoreline of faith... but unlike the disciples and thank God... most people... the chaotic whirlwind inside him found horrific expression... Bp. Wayne Hougland recently said that we all... every single one of us... needs to grow up and take responsibility for ourselves... and we can't do that when we blame others for our own internal storms... he also said that to be ignorant is not to be stupid...

but to ignore the information we need to grow up and take responsibility for ourselves... and for the world around us...

And when... as step Four of the Twelve Steps says... we take a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves... when we let go of blame... and simply take stock of who we are and who we're not... when we can embrace our strengths and our weaknesses without shame or humiliation... then we're at a much better place from which we can continue our inner journey... from fear to faith... and trust...

There is chaos in the cosmos around us... entire galaxies are crashing into each other... black holes are ripping nearby stars apart... red giant stars explode into supernovas and quasars... and there is chaos in the world... but we don't need to be crashing into each other... on Thursday morning... the headline of the Charleston Post and Courier... said *Church Attack Kills Nine*... but that headline was partially obstructed... that headline wasn't front and center... because covering part of that headline was an ad for a gun shop running a special... it may be... as the paper said... unfortunate timing... I call it evil... that no thinking human being realized that that would just be plain wrong... and pull it...but it highlights our country's obsession with guns... something President Obama said... just doesn't happen in other developed countries...

Jesus teaches us... encourages us... and accompanies us on all of our outer and inner journeys... and like a parent teaching a toddler to walk... he wants us to grow up so we can make the journey to faith on our own... he wants us to bring our full... authentic... and healthy selves to relationship... and to community... but when we fall... he picks us up... steadies us... points us in the right direction... and launches our boats again... and he forgives us... when with penitent hearts... we ask for it... even... we believe...
Dylan Roof.

Mike+