

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49
Psalm 9:9-20
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

Proper 7B
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
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Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?

Poignant words, aren't they? The last time this scripture came around in our lectionary – 3 years ago on this 5th Sunday after Pentecost, 9 people who had gathered for a Wednesday evening Bible study had been shot dead in their church in Charleston. Nine good people had welcomed in a stranger, and treated him as their own. And after spewing vile, racist rhetoric, that stranger they had welcomed killed each one of them.

Do you not care that we are perishing?

While we haven't had a notorious mass shooting this week, the racism, fear and divisiveness that were at the heart of that shooting three years ago, are alive and well today. I know that what happened in Charleston was unquestionably an act of racist hatred against African Americans, it strikes fear in our hearts too. And it's not lost on me that one could be tempted to isolate even further because in inviting that young white man in to their African American circle, they invited their killer into their midst.

It can be tempting to think that that the best thing to do is to isolate ourselves, to pull back, to protect ourselves, surround ourselves with people who look like us and think like us. But to do that is to be driven by fear. Why would we do that? What are we afraid of? I ask myself that in the face of the horrific events that have been happening at our borders... what are we afraid of? As I said in my note to you last week, I know the issue of immigration is complex. I also know that fear creates in us a desire to separate and isolate from that which we deem "other." And if we make someone "other" enough, it won't be long until we've dehumanized them. And once they've lost their humanity in our minds and hearts, we can treat them in ways we would never treat the humans in our midst, whether they be the ones we love or the ones we don't. This is the ugly, downward spiral fear can take us on. No wonder Jesus is always saying "*Don't be afraid.*" Over and over again he says it - *Do not be afraid.*

Easier said than done one might say, but this isn't Polly Anna talking. It's Jesus so we need to listen, to really listen and to hear his words. *Don't be afraid.* Jesus doesn't say there's nothing scary out there. He says *Don't be afraid.* Yes, there are scary things in our lives AND we have choices about how we respond. Last week, a handful of us chose to respond to our fear and despair by joining together with people of many faith traditions, to sing and pray and praise, and to be inspired by the words of Jesus that are as true today as they were 2,000 years ago. *Love God. Love your neighbor.* Together, we walked with our neighbors, some of them very different from us and some much the same, from St Marks Cathedral to St James Cathedral singing,

praying and praising God for the love that can save us all. We went for lots of reasons. We went because it is good to be together when we're suffering, because we needed to see and be with other people who are acting on their faith too. We went because we wanted to defeat the temptation to forget that we are the ones who carry the Christ light, the ones who must be the heart and hands and feet of God in our world.

In difficult times, it can be tempting to want an all-powerful God who will put a stop to all the nonsense going on around us, a mighty god, a god akin to the one the Palm Sunday people wanted. A god who is supremely powerful, a ruler who will overpower and eliminate everything and everyone that disagrees with what "we" want, whoever the "we" are, a god who will finally DO SOMETHING about all of this, whatever "all of this" may be.

But a god who would manipulate everyone and everything is not the living, loving God we know. The God who loves us is the God of resurrection, the God who redeems everything. Our God does not manipulate, our God incarnates. God incarnated in Jesus and God incarnates in us too. You see, we really are the hands and heart and face of Christ in the world.

There will be storms in our lives... there always are. Life can be going along just fine, and all of a sudden the sky darkens, the wind changes, the waves begin to whip our little boats around and we find ourselves being tossed into a state of pure panic. And when our lives are turned upside down by a tragic accident, a frightening diagnosis, the onset of a grave illness, the loss of a job, a spouse who has been unfaithful, the child who has gone distant, an aging parent making poor decisions, the death of someone we love ... when those storms hit and fear takes over, it can be tempting to call God into question.

Don't you care?

But you see, those storms are the stuff of real life, if we live long enough. And real life is going to happen to all of us. It's going to happen to our children and our grandchildren and our parents and our friends too. The truth is, it can be very scary out there. Jesus didn't say "There is nothing to fear but fear itself"¹... that was another guy. Jesus said *Do not be afraid*. There is a big difference between those two statements... do you hear it? There are lots of scary things in the world, and we actually can't protect ourselves from some of them no matter how hard we try. No matter how hard we work to try to keep the scary stuff at bay, the reality is that we are fragile and tender and vulnerable beings. And sometimes terrible, terrible things happen to us or to the people we love.

God knows that.

It's why Jesus didn't say "there is nothing to fear," but instead asked the disciples *Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt at his first inaugural address

The implication seems clear, doesn't it? It seems like Jesus is saying you're afraid because you don't have faith. But we have to be very careful here. Jesus isn't saying "Muster up your courage and you'll be alright." And he isn't saying "If only you'd pray harder, believe better and turn it all over, you'd be fine." I think what Jesus is saying is that if we could recognize him for who he really is, we wouldn't actually need to be so afraid. If we would just remember that the God of every ocean and star and butterfly and mountain and child, the God of everything that ever was or is or is to come, the God who knows every single hair on our heads and everyone else's too, the God whose name is Love ... if we could just remember that this is the God who is in the boat with us, maybe we wouldn't have to be so afraid. I am quite sure that if we really did recognize Jesus for who he is, we would know we could trust the redeeming power of his love. *Have you still no faith?* doesn't mean "Why aren't you believing hard enough?" It means "You can trust me. I am God. I am here. I love you. I will never abandon you. Ever."

Those disciples never needed to worry that Jesus didn't care about them. What they needed was to remember that the God who is always faithful, the God whose name is Love was in the boat with them. Wishing the storms away won't save us. When we're sinking in fear and panic and despair, the only thing that will rescue us is Love.

The people in the streets, at St Marks and St James last Thursday showed us the truth of that. In the midst of the despair that permeates so many of our hearts, we came together and together we found a better way. We were the hands and feet and voice of the God who loves every single one of us and calls to do the same. In the midst of the hopelessness and fear so many of us have experienced, we had one another and we had our faith in the God who redeems everything and turns it all to love.

All of us can tell the Good News, you know. We can tell the same story Jesus tells over and over again. Because when we do that, we remind one another of the choices we have in the way we live our lives. We can choose to live as though the God of Love were the one true thing, or we can choose to live in fear. We can choose to come together in love or to separate and isolate in hate. We can choose to let Christ's love and light shine through us, comforting one another and reminding each other that we are God's own beloved, or we can turn away. We can say to one another "Do not be afraid," and mean it. Or not. Every one of those choices matters. And one way or another, every one of those choices we make will change the world. What will you choose? Amen.