

August 13, 2017 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33

Rev. Jen Nagel, Outdoor Worship, University Lutheran Church of Hope, Minneapolis

(Reference to Thich Nhat Hanh from the intro he wrote in Thomas Merton's book *Contemplative Prayer*)

Grace, Peace, Love, to you, People of God, from our Lord and Savior. Amen.

I love this patio space, this east side of our building, and I love being able to worship outside in this beauty.

Location, location, location, it matters in real estate, it matters in the Bible, it matters in our lives.

The context, the location for today gospel, actually begins in the story we heard last week.

Jesus has just gotten the news that John the Baptist has been killed, and not simply killed, but beheaded.

Remember that John the Baptist is Jesus cousin of sorts, his friend, his colleague.

Before they were born, their mothers reveled together in their respective unexpected pregnancies.

And once they grew up, John was the opener for Jesus, and in fact baptized Jesus in the River Jordan.

And now John has been killed... for speaking the truth to power.

It's political, no doubt, but also personal for Jesus, personal as in it's his friend John who was killed, and personal as in

Jesus, too, is all about speaking truth to power and the cross is not so far away.

So when John is killed, Jesus tries to go away to pray, to take some time alone,

But the crowds follow and as we heard last week Jesus ends up feeding 5000 plus.

And then comes today's story: Jesus dismisses the crowd, he sends the disciples on ahead, and he again slips away to

a deserted placed, wanting to pray, grieving, scared, perhaps angry.

But he can't seem to get a proper break: that's when the wind comes up, that's when the disciples are so very, very

frightened, that's when Jesus, and then Peter walks on water and Jesus calms the wind.

That's the context for today's gospel.

And since context matters, I'm thinking about our context:

Obviously outside; these later weeks of August as fall schedules loom big and we try to savor summer.

But I'm thinking of the news this week: the riots in Charlottesville, the growing tensions with North Korea.

Last Saturday's attack at Dar Al Farooq, the Islamic Center in Bloomington.

I'm thinking of our personal lives and many struggling with illness and uncertainty, and others grieving after such heavy death, while still swimming in the memories of these loved ones we've lost.

I'm thinking of students and faculty and staff, teachers and parents gearing up for school and all the excitement and nerves that comes along with that: classes and roommates and new routines.

What winds are blowing in your life?

What storms are swirling?

What feels like rough water?

That's the context, the location for today's Gospel and for our hearing of this living Gospel, that's the location.

Three points for this morning, just three: Tone, Trust, and Peace.

First, on Tone: Can you hear your mom's voice in your head? The tone of voice matters, oh it matters.

There's the it's time to come in from playing because it's getting dark tone, there's the screechy I can't be lived you

did that, I'm losing it tone, and

there's the I'm trying to be serious but really I just want to hug you and laugh tone.

At first today Jesus says, "Take heart, it's me, don't be afraid."

And then to Peter, Jesus says, "Come."

And finally at the end of the scene: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Sometimes that last bit, why did you doubt, stings.

But it's tone that I've been thinking about: all the different ways Jesus could say each of these lines.

It's the same Jesus, the same Savior who says It's me, take heart, don't be afraid, as who asks, why did you doubt?

Maybe we don't need to read a sting into his tone.

Maybe we can read love, tired love, but love:

Why did you doubt? I love you, I won't let you go, don't be afraid. Tone matters.

And then Trust: I spent the week with some of our high school students and their friends, almost all boys, and one girl.

We were white water canoeing on the Brule River in northern Wisconsin through Camp Amnicon.

It was a wonderful, powerful week, and a great trip.

You can imagine, can't you, the mix of nearly constant banter, back and forth about movies and farting and facial hair, and this highly sensitive, reflective, incredibly supportive team that we formed.

It rained perhaps 20 hours straight as we faced the ledges, the toughest sets of rapids as the Brule flows north to drop into Lake Superior.

We were nervous and excited and soaked to the bone as we scouted which chutes we'd try to follow.

Later that night, when the rain had finally stopped, and the moon had risen and we were relatively dry and warm around a hard-won fire, I read them today's gospel.

They connected those challenging hours with Peter getting out of the boat, trusting that Jesus and the rest of the group would hold on to you whether you tipped or not.

Finally, Peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh, writing about contemplative prayer, says that in a true prayer we ask only for the things that we really need, and that the things we really need are **peace, solidity, and freedom.**

The wind in today's story, the fear and challenges in our lives—and then some new challenge after that—these will always be around us.

They will will ebb and flow, but they are always there, and mostly out of our control.

The peace though, the freedom, comes from the source, it comes from God's presence, it comes for Peter from Jesus striding across those waves, reaching out a hand, and our willingness to reach back, and to be lifted up, again and again, connected.

Dear friends, this is how we are changed, this is how the world changes, the peace of God tethering us in the winds, the storms, always connected, always reconnecting.

Tone. Trust. Peace. "I'm here," Jesus says, "I'm here, it's okay, you don't have to be afraid anymore."

God's mercy, God's forgiveness, God's power is bigger than all the crazy storms that will come.

"I'm here, it's okay, you don't have to be afraid."

That's the promise for today, God is here, in the midst of the wind, and that makes all the difference.

Amen.