

August 9, 2020 10th Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:9-18, Matthew 14:22-33

Rev. Jen Nagel and Beloved of God, Ann Rolle, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Let's begin with prayer... May the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength in the winds and the waves. Amen.

Grace and peace to you.

During the month of August we're making extra spaces in our services to share stories and to add more voices.

The "I wonder, I notice sermon" last week is an example of this.

So is picking favorite hymns and sharing why they carry meaning for us.

I love hearing all your stories.

Stories of doubts, stories of questions, stories of faith.

Today I asked Ann Rolle to team up and share the preaching with me... and Ann said yes!

Of course she was, and probably is a little nervous, a little daunted, yet she said yes.

Thank you so much, Ann, for sharing a story of your faith.

Some of you were present on a warm June evening in 2017.

We squished into the Lounge at University Lutheran Church of Hope,
packed-in in a way that we certainly wouldn't do during COVID.

The windows were open, the evening sun was beautiful, folks spilled into the hallway.

We were eager to hear about Ann's long journey.

That spring and early summer of 2017, Ann walked 500 miles on the Camino de Santiago,
from northwest France,
over the Pyrenees Mountains in Northern Spain,
across the plains, or Meseta (*may say ta*),
to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

That's where St. James, the apostle, is buried.

Ann, you told me that when you first heard about the Camino you wondered

"Why would anyone *choose* to walk across Spain?"

But that planted a seed.

After years of wrestling with God, you answered "Yes."

And you started making plans to walk the Camino.

Jen: So, to start... Ann, what did you first notice about our readings today?

I noticed fear. The disciples probably didn't sleep well in their tossing boat, and when Jesus walked toward them **on the sea** they were really afraid.

I noticed that when Peter became frightened, or lost faith, he began to sink

I noticed Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid," Which he says alot, and "You of Little faith"

In both of the readings. I noticed the reference to wind.

In Kings the author writes, "And now there was a great wind,"

And in today's gospel Matthew writes that, "The wind was against them and their boat was battered by the waves."

Of course, I have never walked on water, but I have experienced GREAT WIND.

Jen: Tell us about that great wind?

The night before my 12 mile climb over the Pyrenees mountains that separate France from Spain, I met Edith.

Edith was a fascinating Swiss woman who knew all about mountains. During our conversation she looked up sniffed. Then she reported that **when** the air smells this way there will be rain and storms.

The morning was grey as I started my trek. It was win-deee, **so** windy that Pilgrim's hats blew off and were forever gone. It began to rain so Pilgrims stopped and pulled out their raingear.

The mighty wind caught their ponchos and backpack covers like spinnaker-sails and blew them to who knows where.

People were blown over, too. One woman fell and broke her arm ending her Camino on day 2.

A stocky German pilgrim was blown over, landing on his face, and breaking his nose

Pilgrims were blown backwards, smack on to their packs, and laid like turtles, arms and legs flapping until fellow pilgrims came to their aid.

Jen: Oh my, Ann, I'm sorry to be laughing, but this wind is so intense.

This was by far the strongest wind I had ever experienced. I'd bend into the wind, leading with my head. At some points I would have to work at lifting my foot enough to take a step.

As I climbed I thought it odd that **sand** was being blown into my face. There is no **sand** on the side of a mountain... it was sleet.

The sleet turned to snow. Visibility was zero. There was no shelter. Periodically several of us would huddle together to share a handful of soggy trail mix quick before the howling wind got it.

Jen: With all that wind, in the gospel we hear the story of Peter teetering between faith and doubt. Out there on the water, in the waves, can Peter really trust Jesus? What can you share about your faith and your fears on your pilgrimage?

The pilgrimage was really hard for me ... physically, emotionally, spiritually. I'd cry every morning. It was physically gruelling. I was **just plain exhausted** and **afraid**.

And yet, if there was **ever** a time that I felt covered in prayer and close to God, it was on my camino. These were sacred days.

I'd walk and think of friends and family, **entire congregations**, holding me in prayer. I could feel it. I'd stop in nearly every church that was open, to pause and light a candle. For me, for you, for everybody.

Eventually, my fears would turn to gratitude.

I'd think of the pilgrims centuries before me that did not have light-weight, quick-dry clothing and custom orthotics in their boots. I wondered how they managed.

I prayed a lot. My most uttered prayer was "Help"

Again and again I'd hear God whisper "Do not be afraid." I am with you. You will make it. You of little faith, why do you doubt?"

I tried to not dwell on the physical pain I was experiencing.

After the initial soaking of my boots, they remained wet for days, I developed blisters and more blisters.

Daily, several times a day, I'd lean over on my hiking poles and weep. After a few deep breaths I'd wipe my nose, and raise my teary eyes to look around for inspiration. And, in every direction I saw... Spain.

I was a pilgrim on the Camino. God had prepared me for this.

And even when I thought that God had made a **terrible** mistake, I knew the truth.

I was supposed to be in that place.

On that day.

I was exactly where I belonged....

And then, I'd walk some more.

Jen: Thanks for sharing that Ann. As you and I spoke this week, you mused: Maybe some people have a lot of faith, or maybe we have a little faith and we just keep using it. Can you tell me again that story?

Shortly after I returned, a friend remarked that she admired my bravery and faith and wished to be like me. I shook the compliment off thinking, "You don't want to be like me."

Later that day, I reflected and journaled. This is what I wrote, I'll read it to you:

Jen: Yes, please.

"You are so full of faith," my friend said at breakfast. I said, "No, no, no, I'm not."

*I did not wish to be argumentative. That is not my nature. But I'm **NOT** full of faith.*

I have the faith of a mustard seed. The faith of a mustard seed is all I need. I keep reusing it.

Some days when I feel hopeless and lost I search for that mustard seed. I squint to see it.

I feel through the lint in the corners of my pockets to find it.

And.... I always do.

"Hello Ann," Faith says to me.

"Did you lose me for a spell?" I feel foolish for losing Faith and pleased that she will take me back.

Always.

Bigger is not always better. This faith, the size of a mustard seed I can understand and comprehend.

I've made room for faith in my life, in my body and my soul.

*The emptiness in my life does not need to be filled with **more** faith.*

I have enough to move mountains.

It is concentrated like laundry detergent, you don't need much.

A mustard seed of faith is enough..... if you keep reusing it.

Jen: Hm, that's powerful, Ann. And tell us how your prayer has changed?

My practice of quiet prayer and writing in the morning has returned.

I'm learning to accept the gift of grace. During Covid I have slowed down a lot. I'm realizing that It is not **sinful** for me to be less productive, it is **essential**.

Even though my **production** has slowed substantially, God does not judge me by this.

At the end of the day when I reflect, I know I am "Ann, child of God." -----That's grace.

I love Centering Prayer. I find great comfort in praying as part of a group. It makes my heart sing.

As for the Camino, I followed a call. Just as **you** have all followed calls: to attend college or quit college.
To speak on behalf of those that have no voice, to make your presence known during a protest,

to feed the hungry. To be a vegetarian, to learn a trade.

To study art, or science, or whatever.

I wasn't particularly physically fit, I was plain, and yet, I was called to walk the Camino.

I was called, as millions of people before me, to pilgrimage across Spain to the Atlantic.

Now I include daily prayers for pilgrims. My prayer is this: **God, bless the pilgrims..... and we are all pilgrims.**

We don't have to walk the Camino, most of us won't. But we are all pilgrims, caught in the wind, facing our fears, seeking a silent place, seeking God.

Jen: Seeking God. Yes, I feel it.

**Last Sunday I noticed that when we asked for favorite hymns at the start of worship,
you typed into the chat something about Thy Holy Wings being a favorite
and that you hummed it often during your pilgrimage.**

In a few minutes we'll sing that hymn as our Hymn of the Day.

Ann, tell us more about why it's important to you.

Zach played Thy Holy Wings several months before I started my pilgrimage. I was already teary, being in church and all, but when I heard this song I started to cry. It touched me... with sighs too deep for words to express.

I copied the lyrics and taped it to my refrigerator until I memorized the first verse.

I loved the line, "And let me rest securely through good and ill in thee."
Which I frequently changed to: "Let me WALK securely"

I was doing a lot of walking, and doing it **securely** was a tremendous vision.

Jen: Thank you, Ann, for sharing your faith...
God bless the pilgrims..... and we are all pilgrims.
Amen.