

In the Proper Time
Psalm 145 and John 6:16-21
July 25, 2021

When I read a scripture passage, I always pay attention to something that jumps out at me: a sentence, a phrase, a word, a theme. I wonder why that certain word or phrase did that. Is God trying to say something to me? Is there something that I need to be telling the congregation? Is something happening in my life that these words have a special meaning?

When I read these two scripture passages from the lectionary, I noticed two phrases right away. One phrase from each reading. They spoke to what I experienced as I helped our family go through the death of my Father. I share these two phrases with you this morning and how I experienced them these last several months. This is a personal sermon. I want to show you that the Bible is living, God speaks through it, and it pertains to our life each day.

You heard the first reading from Psalm 145. The second reading is from the Gospel of John 6:16.....

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As I read this passage, some of you who were here last Sunday were probably thinking: why is Diane reading the same scripture passage as last week? Technically, it isn't the same scripture passage. It is the same story, but from a different Gospel. Pastor Craig read and preached on the story from the Gospel of Mark. Ours today is from the Gospel of John. The lectionary, for some reason, had the same story two weeks in a row. Why is that, I wondered?

Well, it gives the opportunity to compare the same story in different Gospels. What is interesting is that the basic story is the same, but the authors of the Gospels chose to emphasize different parts. The Gospel writers were writing to different people, so their stories are slightly different to speak to their audiences. Just like my sermon today will be very different from Craig's sermon last week. We don't have different audiences, but we are different preachers.

What is different in today's reading from last Sunday's story of Jesus walking on the water? Actually, they are quite similar, but I noticed a slight addition to the story in John that I have been thinking about...a lot. John adds the phrase "they were willing to take him into the boat."

The wind is raging. They aren't getting anywhere in their rowing of the boat. They see Jesus coming towards them walking on the water, which scares the heck out of them because they don't recognize him. Until they hear Jesus' voice: "It is I. Don't be afraid."

At the end of April, my Dad fell and broke his back. My brother asked me to come to Minneapolis and help. I came as soon as I could, and stayed with my Mom as Dad was moved to rehab. The first night I stayed with Mom, she decided to go to bed early. I was still on Arizona time, which is two hours behind Minnesota, so I stayed awake a while longer.

A little bit later, I heard my Mom get up. I went in to see if she needed any help. I was standing in the hallway outside her bedroom. All she saw was a shadow of me due to a night light in that hallway. Standing by her bed with her walker, she yelled out, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" She had forgotten I was staying with her.

Without moving, I said, "It's me, Mom. Your daughter." Recognizing my voice, she calmed down. When Jesus spoke in the raging wind, they recognized his voice. Do we recognize Jesus' voice in the storm? Do we hear the "It is I. Don't be afraid"? It behooves us to learn to recognize Jesus' voice before the storms come, so when Jesus does speak in the storm, we recognize His presence.

The disciples know who is walking on the water. When Jesus said, "It is I," these are the words God spoke when Moses met God in the burning bush. God said, "I AM." It is I. The presence of the Lord.

Once they recognized Jesus, the passage says the disciples were willing to take him into the boat. It sounds strange. Who wouldn't want Jesus in their boat in the midst of a storm? But are we always willing to have Jesus in our boat in the storm?

There have been some times in my storms when I ignore Jesus, or say, "I really don't want you right now." Probably because I am angry that I am in a storm. I remember when the pandemic started, I was angry at God. Why doesn't God take better care of the earth?

What we take away from this story is Jesus doesn't always keep us from storms. The importance is Jesus in the storms with us.

Having faith in God doesn't mean that we won't suffer. The disciples went through a real storm. Jesus himself suffered and died while holding on to faith. Faith means the presence of Christ in the midst of the storm.

We should expect storms. Scripture calls us to be ready for them. Growing up in Minnesota, we expected tornadoes and prepared for them. We had basements, and we learned what corner of the basement to hide in when the sirens went off. In fact, our community practiced with the sirens once a month; I think it was 1 p.m. on the first Wednesday of the month. We kept canned food and drinking water in our basements. We were ready for the storm.

As Christians, we are called to be ready for the storms. To get to know Jesus so well that when Jesus calls out to us in our storm, we recognize his voice and willingly allow him into our boat.

When Jesus comes, the miracle is the One who walks on water to be with you. The miracle is not making the wind stop, but Jesus gets into the boat with us. The miracle is not the calming of the storm, but the miracle of calming us in the storm. Jesus gives us the miracle of his presence in the middle of our storms.

Now, turn to the Psalm and how the truths in this Psalm spoke to me in the storm.

When I was called back to Minnesota, I couldn't imagine I would be gone three weeks. We had to find a place for my Dad, but we didn't know what he could or could not do. Can he go into assisted living so Mom and him could be together? In order to go into assisted living, he had to be able to get himself in and out of the wheelchair.

Each visit to the rehab center, I encouraged Dad to work hard to strengthen his legs and arms. He tried, but he was in so much pain that he couldn't do it. The rehab place was giving us a date when Dad had to leave.

My brother and I researched and called and interviewed various senior care facilities, looking for a place that could meet his needs, trying to come up with some kind of plan to keep my parents together. I kept visiting Dad every day, and stayed with my Mom who struggled without his presence.

And hanging over all of this was the trip to Greece, a study leave to follow the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. I had never traveled overseas before. I had signed up for it August 2019. Originally scheduled for June of 2020, it was postponed to June of this year. That date was fast approaching. What do I do? Stay? Go?

I remember one evening sitting in my car in Minneapolis and calling Katie Sayre who originally asked me to go on this trip, "I can't do this." Crying on the phone. I wanted to be with my family. But every single person said to me, "Go. Go to Greece." Even my brother. Especially Katie. The timing of all this boggled my mind. Why is this all happening just before my trip to Greece?

I wrote in one of my email blasts to you: “At this point, my brother and I don’t know what to do. I lie awake in my bed at night and say my prayers: “God, help us.” That’s it. These words are the only ones I can think of at this point.”

“The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down,” our Psalmist says in this Psalm. The Psalmist goes on: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.”

At the proper time. That is the phrase that jumped out at me. I often question God’s timing. I did that in another email blast. I wrote, “ So I wonder (perhaps question?) God’s timing. And learn to trust. Prayerfully one day, the answer will be in another email blast, or perhaps a sermon.”

Here we are....in a sermon. And Jesus presented himself in the storm. At the proper time.

We finally met with the social worker at the rehab place. She recommended Memory Care for my Da.. We just stared at her. Memory Care? He has a broken back we reminded her. Cognitively, she said, his mind has been slipping. She explained that if Dad went into a nursing home, it will be a hospital like setting. He has been miserable in the hospital like setting. If he went into Memory Care, it will more of home atmosphere.

Now what do we do? We hadn’t even considered Memory Care before or looked for it. We had a week to figure it out. We decided to call the director of the senior residence my parents have been living for the past 3 years. Meet with me this afternoon, she said. She consulted with other leaders at the residence, and they told us their plan. We have a Memory Care Unit. We have an apartment all ready to go that is large enough for both your parents. Mom will be considered Assisted Living, but she can live with Dad. We can be ready next week.

My brother and I looked at each in astonishment, without having to consult one another, we both knew our answer. Yes!

Jesus in the storm. At the proper time.

After we got my parents settled, it was time to come back here to Green Valley because I had been away for three weeks. I sat by the bedside of my Dad to say goodbye. I knew he was dying, but we didn't know how long it would take. My brother told me to go back home. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. My job as a pastor is to sit by the bedside of people dying, and I had to leave my Dad's side.

I came back here. It was two weeks before my trip. What do I do? So I said a prayer. I usually don't tell God what to do...but this time I did, "God, if Dad dies two weeks before the trip, I will go. If he dies the week of my trip, I stay."

Dad died 10 days away from my trip. I immediately flew back to Minneapolis to plan my Dad's gravesite and to be with Mom. Dad wanted to be buried at Ft Snelling. He was a WWII vet and wanted military honors at his gravesite. The problem: Ft Snelling is an extremely busy place. We were told that we couldn't get a military gravesite service until July.

We were crushed. Now what do we do? Our funeral director knew about my trip to Greece, and worked her magic to get a slot the Tuesday before I left on my trip (which was Thursday). Apparently, I was supposed to go to Greece.

Jesus in the storm. At the proper time.

My Dad's death reminded me of another truth: that God gives the grace/strength at the proper time.

My brother and Dad were great friends. Over the past twenty years as we watched our parents age, my brother would say to me, "When the time comes when Dad dies, I won't know what to do. I won't be able to handle it. You will have to do it."

But when the time came, my brother said, "I have been dreading this moment for twenty years. But you know what? It's okay. I can do this."

God gives what we need at the proper time. Not before. But at the moment it is needed. God gives us the strength, the wisdom, the grace to handle what we need...At the proper time.

Jesus got into our storm, and step by step, moment by moment carried us through. In the proper time.

May you be willing to take Jesus into your storm. At the proper time, God will give you what you need. Not before. But at the right time.

I end as our Psalmist ends, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call in on him in truth." Amen.

Having heard these words, let us affirm our faith together as a Body of Christ by standing and saying the Apostle's Creed.