

**Proper 7, Year B**  
**The Rev. Martha L. Hubbard**

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They had been with Jesus for a while now, following and watching as he taught and healed and banished demons. They marveled at him – his focus, his clarity, his passion for what he called the kingdom of God. They wondered at his seeming lack of fear of the authorities and what they might do to him if he kept going as he was going – banging up against religious and social rules and norms. They had never met anyone else like him and though his ways sometimes scared and confused them, they were drawn to him.

Now it was late in the day and he had been teaching for hours, offering his stories to the crowd, trying to illustrate his vision of God's purposes. He had been doing this from a boat set just a short way out from shore, because so many people had heard about him and had come to listen, and they had all pressed in close to get near to him – perhaps hoping his spiritual power might touch and heal and bring light to them too. Being in the boat, just a few feet off shore gave him and the disciples some breathing room.

As evening set in Jesus turned to his disciples and told them that he wanted to go across to the other side of the sea of Galilee. So often they felt bewildered in his presence, but not in that moment. At least four of them were accomplished fishermen- sand, sea and boats were in their blood. They sprang into action at his request! Indeed Mark tells us "*they took him with them in the boat, just as he was*". I wonder what is Mark getting at with this statement that they took him "*just as he was*"?

I know the scripture does not say this - so this is my little midrash on this passage - this is my reading between the lines - but I imagine those fishermen, turned disciples, passed knowing looks and smiles among themselves as they headed that boat out to sea - into the waves and the wind. This was their element - their realm of confidence. Perhaps it would be fun to give their good teacher a bit of a ride - see if they could shake him up a bit. Always in command on land, perhaps he would not be so sure of himself on the open water. But no such luck. It seems that not long after they pushed off from shore, he laid down his head on a pillow in the back of the boat and fell fast asleep.

Then, the scripture tells us, things took a serious turn. They had skill and they had experience, but the storm that rose up was bigger and

stronger. No matter how keen their ability in navigation their boat was not big enough to withstand it and they began to take on water. How quickly their confidence morphed into alarm, then desperation! And Jesus? Jesus slept on.

The terror the disciples must have been feeling at that moment came home to me on a gut wrenching level this week as I read the Daily News articles about the young man who lost his life off of Hampton Beach on Sunday, when the boat that he and his friend were fishing from was overtaken by wind and waves – such a tragedy. He was only 25 years old and the paper article said he and his high school sweetheart were preparing to be married this September. I can only imagine the heartbreak that his family and friends are going through right now.

Sometimes in life things go terribly wrong like this. Sometimes no matter how knowledgeable, talented, experienced or strong we are, forces beyond us can take over and sink us – literally or figuratively.

It is in moments like those that our soul screams out, “*Why?*” If God is good and loves us, how can such things happen? If God is good and loves us, how can young people full of promise drown, how children get cancer, how can relationships fall apart, how can livelihoods and home be

lost from one day to the next, how can people starve to death – how can human beings suffer so? How and why?

When I am in that space with those questions, my spiritual training pushes me to put my gaze back on God’s face revealed to me in Jesus – even if I feel mad as hell at God at the moment, and I have to force myself, I turn the eyes of my spirit to Christ. And when I do - when I seriously contemplate his life here with us, in the human family - I realize that professing faith in him is not about professing that he has come to make all of our suffering better. When I contemplate his life here among us in the human family, I recognize that faith in Christ is in essence acceptance of God’s presence, companionship and grace in the midst of suffering – God’s comradeship in the storm.

Reflecting on this Gospel passage in the *Christian Century Magazine* this week, Kate Layzer, pastor of Union Congregational Church in Winthrop, MA, writes:

*“What happens when the storm breaks in all its fury? When the disciples rouse [Jesus] and urge him to panic? He sits up, this tired, vulnerable man, and turns and speaks directly to the wind and the waves. ‘Peace,’ he says, ‘Be still.’...*

*Offered the choice between fight or flight, he goes with direct engagement. He speaks to the storm and utters that word of power spoken over the waters from*

*the beginning. He speaks, and the eternal word is present- greater than the wind and the waves, greater than our fear of conflict, greater than our drive for power and dominion, greater than sin, greater than death. His is the word that is able to bring peace where peace seems out of the question.”(Christian Century, June 16, 2009, p 18)*

When we are found in Christ, the eternal word of peace is our companion in calm and in storm - in grief and in joy - in clarity and in confusion. Christ is not our way out. Christ is our way through into the fullness of life. Christ is our way through, because when we are found in him, he is about the work of reconciling and redeeming all of life.

I leave you with a something I once heard Madeline L’Engle tell at a retreat day. She told of a dream she had in which she was a fish, swimming happily along in beautiful, warm, ocean waters, just off the shore of a tropical island. She swam along for a while and then noticed that there was another fish swimming along side of her. Wherever she swam the other fish shadowed her. Finally she asked the other fish its name and why it was swimming with her. It responded *“I am Christ, and I will never leave you.”* Not long thereafter, a great big fish came along and swallowed her. In the complete darkness of the belly of the great fish she cried out, *“Christ, are you there?”* the answer came, *“Yes Madeline, I am here.”*

She cried out again, *“Christ why did you let this happen?”* The answer came back, *“I did not say I would save you from suffering, just that I would never leave you alone. Follow me.”*

In Christ's name, and for his sake.

Amen+