

# COPING WITH THE STORM

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

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8:30 and 11:05 a.m. services

*(Third Sunday after Pentecost)*



## ST. PAUL'S

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### Lectionary Texts:

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

## 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

<sup>6</sup>As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup>For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup>We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup>but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup>beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup>by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup>truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup>in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup>as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup>as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

<sup>11</sup>We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. <sup>12</sup>There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. <sup>13</sup>In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.

## Mark 4:35-41

<sup>35</sup>On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”

<sup>36</sup>And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup>A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>8</sup>But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

<sup>39</sup>*He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"*

*Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

<sup>40</sup>*He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

<sup>41</sup>*And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

It is just a coincidence that all of these stories in our scripture lessons today fall on Father's Day. Each story is about a man facing a challenge and overcoming. The young boy David slays the giant Goliath against all odds. Paul and his companions face all kinds of hardships as catalogued in the text from the Corinthian letter and yet come through it all victorious. And of course Jesus in the gospel story calms the raging storm.

We read these stories today because it is the third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, and not because it is Father's Day. The day of Pentecost varies every year because it is based on when Easter is, and Easter is a moveable feast depending on phases of the moon, of all things. So texts fall on different Sundays in different years. But I am sure that most of you came here thinking much more about Father's Day than about the third Sunday of Pentecost. And I am sure that because of the varieties of family experiences that people gather here today with many different thoughts, memories, and emotions about fathers today. I trust that wherever you are today, there will be something for you as we think about the texts that emphasize overcoming adversity.

The richest text for me is Jesus calming the storm. It is an interesting text when you consider the context. Jesus has already had a heavy preaching and teaching schedule. He's already run into some conflict, and people are beginning to take notice of him. At the beginning of Chapter 4, there are so many people crowding around Jesus that he gets in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and continues his teaching from there. So, at the end of the day, Jesus suggests to the disciples that they just take the boat and go across the water to the other side. In this case, Jesus invites the disciples to sail into a storm. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful body of water. It is in the north of Israel and is fed by the Jordan River, which continues then to empty

into the Dead Sea. Many Bible stories happen on or near or around the Sea of Galilee. I've taken a boat ride on it myself. Storms arise quickly, and the waters can rage and be quite treacherous. The text in the gospel reading today gives the account of just such a storm. When the storm hits, the disciples fear for their life, yet Jesus is sound asleep. When they wake him, he stills the raging storm.

Two words that Jesus speaks in this story are significant. The first word he speaks is to the storm. "Peace. Be still," he says, and the waters become quiet. Sometimes Jesus still speaks to a storm today. Who can predict in the midst of a crisis or challenge what course the storm will take because of the presence of Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus speaks to the storms of life yet today. But in my experience, it is that second word that Jesus speaks that is most common.

The second word he speaks is not to the storm, but to the disciples. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" It is this word that you and I must hear. Sometimes the storms of life dissipate, just go away. But more times than not, you and I must find courage and faith to ride out the storm.

In the story we have before us today, the storm at sea became calm. But the storms of life for Jesus and those early disciples did not go away. In fact, as soon as they go ashore on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, on the other side of the storm, the first thing that happens is that they are confronted by the disturbed person who lives amongst the tombs. We call him the Geresene demoniac, the man of the village of the Geresenes who was possessed by demons, as the scripture says. We might talk about it in a different way today, but we all know what it is like to deal with angry, out of control people. You remember in that story, Jesus sends the demons into a herd of pigs who run off into the sea and drown. The pigs drown, but the demons no doubt live on. The storm at sea went away, but the storms of life continue.

Jesus took care of the storm at sea, but he knew that the disciples would need courage and faith to face the ongoing storms of life. Sometimes, Jesus speaks a word to the storm. Most of the time, he speaks a word to us in the midst of the storm.

Thomas Mann said, "Each human life must work through all of the joys and all of the sorrows, all of the gains and all of the losses which make up the history of the world."

That is a heavy sentence, but it is true that every person must face challenges in life. Goliath wouldn't go away. David had to face him, and when he did, he emerged victorious.

In that remarkable letter of Paul to the Corinthian Church, he recounts all of the hardships and challenges that he has faced and sums it up by saying, "we are alive."

Both David and Paul found courage and faith to overcome the challenges of life.

In one of my early appointments, I visited homebound members of the church. One that I visited on a regular basis was Mrs. Fitzgerald. She lived alone in a little one-bedroom, white frame house. Her husband had died long ago, and by this time in life, one of her children had also died. When I was her pastor, she was in her nineties. She had had a hard life with very little money and some very real health concerns. But every time I visited her, I received more love and wisdom and inspiration than I ever gave to her. And I still remember to this day the crude little plaque that hung on the wall in her living room. It said, "Prayer changes people; people change things." In her long life, she faced every challenge with courage and faith.

Sometimes Jesus speaks to the storm; most of the time, he speaks to us. The word of Jesus is powerful. That word from Jesus will enable you to find courage and faith you did not know you had.

There is a curious phrase at the beginning of this passage. When the disciples are about to take the boat out into the water to get away with Jesus from the crowds, the text says, "They took him with them in the boat, just as he was." They took Jesus "just as he was." It is a curious phrase. How was he? Was he tired or even exhausted? Maybe that is why he slept so soundly. Was he hungry or maybe a bit disheveled from the rigors of the day? Or maybe it had nothing to do with his physical presence. Maybe they just took Jesus for who he was, just as he was, someone they did not fully understand, but someone in whose presence they felt the love of God. It is the love of God after all that is the source of courage and faith for us all.

And the fact of the matter is that they not only took him just as he was, he took them just as they were. And at this point, they were confused and afraid, as the

text indicates. Yet he was willing to take them just as they were. He is willing to take us just as we are as well. It is sometimes a long road to courage and faith, and Jesus knows that there is no such thing as courage without some fear, or faith without some doubt. So, he takes us as we are on the journey toward courage and faith in the midst of the storm. The journey is sometimes a long one, but for those who take Jesus as he is, the outcome is sure.

Ed Hays shares this poem in his book *Prayers for the Domestic Church*:

Time is too slow for those who wait,  
too swift for those who fear,  
too long for those who grieve,  
too short for those who rejoice.  
But for those who love, time is not.

Jesus has all the time in the world for those who take him as he is on the journey toward courage and faith. As the anthem will say in just a few moments, the name of the one who makes every journey into the storm with us is love. On this third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, Father's Day, may you find love on the journey that yields both courage and faith.