

A number of years ago - more than I care to admit - Richard and I went on our first cruise. Our excitement was high and our expectations even higher. We were to leave from Porta Plata in the Dominican Republic...as we stood on the dock looking out over the brilliantly blue water we could see our Ship....it was gleaming white and was just what we had imagined. Behind it, bobbing on the water, was a gun grey battleship looking boat that, by comparison, made our ship look like the Queen Mary. As we got closer to our ship....and as we were led past it the realization hit. We were about to board, what we affectionately came to call the "love tug". On our first day on this ship/boat we went to have lunch...Richard had forgotten something so he went back to our cabin to retrieve it. When he got there he realized that he had forgotten his key....the man in the next room said "not to worry, use mine" All keys and all locks were the same. Not a great testament to security. That night we had a storm of storms. Not only did this ship rock from side to side but it pitched from stem to stern....I held onto my 'bunk' (and it was a bunk) for dear life....because it was my life that I saw flash before my eyes.

And so as I read this scripture reading this week I was reminded of this story. The fear of a watery grave.

This storm that the disciples encountered was no ordinary storm. In Luke's gospel it says "that the storm was so bad that the ship was full of water" In Mark's account that we read this morning it says that "the waves were beating the ship that was full of water" and Matthew says "that the waves covered the ship" And as they were being tossed around on the sea...in the dead of night...not knowing where their ship was headed, doubting if they were going to get there, the person who suggested this journey in the first place is sound asleep "Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow" - (Common English Bible - Study Bible)

And so when the disciples wakened him - I'm sure not with a gentle nudge but with much screaming, hollering and gnashing of teeth...he would have been startled. He calmed the wind and the sea and then turned to them and rather than admonish them he said "you don't get it yet do you - you haven't quite figured it out?"... or words to that effect.

Our lives are full of storms....some little rain falls...some with winds that kick up the dirt...some gather steam and become hurricane force...some are thunder storms that come...go away and come back again and again; and some storms are catastrophic....there isn't a

person sitting here today who hasn't gone through at least one of these storms and may be going through them now....it is so easy to feel alone in those times...so easy to feel that God is "sleeping" and unaware of what we are going through as we are being tossed about - as we are holding on for dear life to make it to the other side...

As a woman I have a patent on worrying. I can take a small rain fall and make it into a hurricane in a very short period of time. I also have the ability to understand that although it is **my** reality at the time it is one of **my** own making. These are storms that I can "calm" in my own mind - they are the ones that I have some control over.

However, there have been times in my life when my worries were reality - they were real and I had no control.

Unlike a weather report where we can look 7 days - sometimes 14 days in advance to see if there are any storms brewing we don't have that luxury. Our storms often come out of the blue and don't all look the same. A phone call...a health diagnosis....a fall....the end of a relationship....the end of a life. Heartache...heartbreak...turmoil...the storms of life.

Sometimes these storms don't 'pass over' they seem to take up residence - they are there when you go to bed at night and you realize when you open your eyes in the morning they are there to weigh you down making it difficult to get out of bed.

. As I was writing this sermon the word 'burdened' kept popping into my head...it is at those times that we are truly burdened..

And it has happened twice in my life were I found myself standing in the middle of a room, saying aloud "Lord...I cannot shoulder this any longer - I am handing it to you" Now, I don't want to go all supernatural on you but I will tell you that I immediately felt a sense of relief. A calmness. I wasn't just sharing my problem - I had done that with friends - no, I was handing it over - giving it away - I can't do it anymore you do it.

I remember watching a news show a few years ago and they did This Week in 90 seconds....there was not ONE good news story...NOT ONE and that day the 90 seconds was taken up with the shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina where 9 African American congregants were gunned down. After listening to 90 seconds of this you can almost hear people saying "where is God in all of this"

... but they neglected to tell the story about one of the survivors who lost her precious son in this massacre who said to the young shooter, "I forgive you - I am aching in every part of my body but I forgive you" "*there* is God in all of this" God - to bring us peace in times of violence...to bring us grace in times of mourning and to bring us love in times of hate; to bring us calm in times of storm.

It is so easy to lose faith during these times - even the disciples did it - those who saw his miracles, heard his message. The disciples were rescued and so are we. I would ask you to look back at the storms in your life - the ones that cut you off at the knees. Look for the moments of God's grace...I guarantee you that you will find them. Leonard Cohen wrote a beautiful song called Anthem and part of the lyrics say "there is a crack - a crack in everything - that's how the light gets in. That light is the friend who shows up unexpectedly - the helping hand from a stranger - the strength to carry on - and whatever might be on your list....you can call it co-incidence if you want - I prefer to call it God's Grace....

There is a wonderful gospel song called "The Storm is Passing Over - the verse says...

Take courage my soul and let us journey on,

though the night is dark and I'm far from home;
praise be to God, the morning light appears

Whatever your problems may be this morning, just maybe what you need to do is sit and listen. It is so easy to feel in those times of heartache that God doesn't care.... Still yourself....listen. Perhaps we are so busy disbelieving we cannot hear....still yourself....believe...listen.

And this from Max Lucado entitled a Gentle Thunder...

Once there was a man who dared God to speak.

Burn the bush like you did for Moses, God. And I will follow.

Collapse the walls like you did for Joshua, God. And I will fight.

Still the waves like you did on Galilee, God. And I will listen.

And so the man sat by a bush, near a wall, close to the sea and waited for God to speak.

And God heard the man, so God answered.

He sent fire, not for a bush, but for a church.

He brought down a wall, not of brick, but of sin.

He stilled the storm, not of the sea, but of a soul.

And God waited for man to respond.

And he waited. . .

And he waited. . .

And waited.

But because the man was looking at bushes, not hearts; bricks and not lives, seas and not souls, he decided that God had done nothing.

Finally he looked to God and asked, 'Have you lost your power?'

And God looked at him and said, 'Have you lost your hearing?' (Max Lucado, "A Gentle Thunder")

In Proverbs 3:24 it says "the sleep of the believer will be sweet and peaceful because he knows the Lord is with him"

I wish for you a good night's sleep tonight....and for this I say

"thanks be to God"

