

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost August 13, 2023

Introduction to the day and its themes

Out of great compassion Jesus has fed crowds-miraculously scarcity has become surplus. Jesus still hasn't had a chance to grieve or to pray. So he goes up a mountain to pray. The events that follow give us a lot to ponder when we join others asking, "Just who is Jesus, anyway?"

Matthew 14:22-33

22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the

boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Sermon

One of the most asked questions we heard as hospital chaplains was "Why is this crisis happening?". Our mentors taught us to help people ask another question that might be of more immediate help...where do you think God is as storms batter you?

Such a question fits for Matthew's first audience- a little community estranged from the larger faith community. This community felt the weight of the hegemony of foreign military empire that dictated the terms of every day living.

Peter and his soggy companions may have asked the same question; where IS God? We who are blown back by pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, and leaders violating public trust might also ask where is God?

Matthew's careful use of detail means to encourage us and to remind us that we're not alone.

The disciples row for all they're worth, making no forward progress; if anything they're blown farther out to sea and deeper into the maelstrom of wind and overwhelming waves.

Churning waves of chaos recall the state of things before creation. In the beginning, God's presence enters into the chaos and the God's breath and speech summon harmony, order and beauty from chaos.

Jesus approaches the chaos and the squall in search of his friends; he walks on the waves in a way recalling Job's description of the Almighty treading over tempestuous water.

Jesus as God's human embodiment comes looking for us in the storm and calls out to us,

"Take heart, you who are seconds from swamp and shipwreck; it is I", His words echo those Moses hears when confronted with a burning bush...I AM—rabbis tell me that God's self disclosure sounds much like our own respiration as we inhale and exhale.

And at that moment when we're sure we're sunk, Jesus stretches out his hand—much as God's hand reached out to part the Red Sea, or to send manna, or heal the sick.

God's interventions for us may not be miraculous all the time. Yet there seems a pattern-God comes looking for us, breathes hope into us, and reaches out to us. As Jesus reminds his apprentices before he ascends to heaven, "I am with you always; even to the end of time."