

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 21, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

“Visible or Invisible”

One of my favorite movies is “Field of Dreams” starring Kevin Costner. It is a favorite for many reasons – first because I love baseball, that is no secret. Anyone who has been in my office sees the picture of me and Tom Seaver, has heard stories and seen my baseball cards from my time when I worked with the Mets – and used to play a lot! Second – because there is this line in the movie when Ray Kinsella, played by Costner looks at the young ghostly catcher, dressed in an old New York Yankees uniform, John Kinsella, and says “Dad, do you want to have a catch?” I lose it every time. Having my father go home to be with the Lord back in 1976 – the very thought of seeing my Dad again and even to play catch with him – which we did a lot when we were both much younger – well it is pretty inexplicable – and makes me all “verklempt.” That movie does it to me every time.

With this being Father's Day – it makes me reflect about and remember so much more about the relationship between a father and his children. I want to acknowledge all of the fathers here today – God bless you! And I also want to acknowledge the children of fathers here today – hey that would be all of us – wouldn't it? It is a combination that God put together. Hey, fathers are not perfect but we need to recognize and understand that we have a model for the perfect Father, our Heavenly Father, and we are all His children – and for that we give thanks and praise.

There was an interesting slide that I had up on the screen during Vacation Bible School during a song called “My Deliverer” that we played almost every night as we were closing things up. This slide during the VBS called “Jesus around the World” during which I had quite a few pictures of Jesus holding the world, but this was a slide of Jesus standing in the heavens looking down on the earth, and it was during the chorus “My Deliverer is coming, my Deliverer is standing by” and the words on the bottom of the screen simply said “Son, Go Get My Children!” It gave me “goose bumps” and it still does. We did have a remarkable week with “Jesus around the World.” It wasn't perfect, but it was fun. First, let me say thank you to everyone who helped to make this a memorable and successful VBS. Jennifer Carter Maas, Holly and Wesley Lott, Amy and Kit Carson, Stephanie and Andrew Deas, Regan and Drew Tanner, Cleary Tanner – (boy can you cook!), George and Jeannette Blampied, Colin and Sandra Toogood, Don and Beverly Campbell, Megan Lott, Marilyn Commins - all of the men and women who helped, and of course the amazing kids who attended and added their insights to a journey around the globe. We experienced an audio visual trip to Mexico, China, Africa, Japan, India, Paraguay, Canada (which some were saying Canadia with a big grin) and Australia. We got to see the impact of knowing Jesus in those parts of the world including an entire Muslim family that gave their lives to Christ. It didn't happen overnight – but it started with a high school student who invited this man to a coffee shop to hear about Jesus. And then from there his brothers and sisters came to Christ, his mother and then finally his father. This was just an amazing testimony. And then the way there are people who are opposed to Jesus – even to the point of saying “God is Dead!” I showed them the video trailer for the film of that

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same name – which we will show at a Family Movie Night here at the church in the fall. It really opened their eyes! (Especially the kids) I think God’s children of all ages that attended enjoyed the 4 days – I know I certainly did in teaching the lessons. The food was amazing – thank you to all who had a hand in spreading the love and Gospel of Jesus!

After exploring other parts of the world - we need to zoom into the area of Galilee and look at the Holy Gospel for today. The Jews were not, by and large, a seafaring people, they were people of agriculture. Their neighbors to north and south, Phoenicia and Egypt, were maritime nations, who traded across the Mediterranean world and beyond. Israel concentrated on the land, which was their promised inheritance from God – farming and fishing in the huge Sea of Galilee or the Jordan River. The larger Mediterranean Sea and other larger unknown bodies of water remained, in Jewish writing, a place and a power of darkness and evil, threatening and wild.

The stories about the sea in the Old Testament, of which there aren’t too many of them, make the same point. God Himself tames it in the Exodus splitting the Red Sea in two, and uses it to stop the disobedient prophet Jonah in his tracks and send him back about his proper business God wanted him to do in Nineveh. All of that is background to this account from Mark’s Gospel. The tale of what happened to the prophet Jonah is worth exploring to see just what’s going on. God told Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh. Jonah didn’t want to, so he got onto a boat going in the opposite direction. A great storm blew up, and so the boat was in danger, but Jonah was asleep and didn’t notice. They woke him up and told him to call on his god to do something. But Jonah knew what was going on. This was the Lord God telling him that he was way out of line; he should have done what he had been told to do in the first place. So God told the sailors to throw him overboard. They did and the storm subsided, and the sea became calm. And as you may know, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, which then spat him out on dry land. Guess what Jonah did? He went off to Nineveh like he was supposed to and carried out his commission. This exciting and dramatic old story was certainly well known to the apostles, and so they might have thought that Jesus is both like and unlike Jonah. This storm didn’t come up because He has refused to do what His Father wanted, but instead it becomes a further sign of His own authority. The disciples wake Jesus up, but He doesn’t have to call on anyone else, not even on His Father, for help. They didn’t have to throw Him overboard either, like Jonah!

Now the Sea of Galilee is a rather interesting place, it is a bowl, with mountains surrounding it, with the Golan Heights to the east and the Galilee Highlands to the west, which includes the Horns of Hittim, through which the wind comes swirling through these two peaked mountains with a valley in between. The winds just come through this and down onto the lake and can happen at a moments’ notice. If you ever go to the Sea of Galilee – hold onto your hat.

Please open your pew Bibles to page 1562 – Mark chapter 4. We can start at verse 37. In another, and even greater, sign of Jesus’ absolute authority, He simply rebukes the winds and the waves and they quiet down at immediately! I don’t know about you – but if I were on that

boat I would be nervous, for this is not a shallow lake. Only one person that we know of ever walked across it!

During this squall, Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples awoke Him and asked Him “Don’t you care if we drown?” It is amazing that Jesus’ reaction is to get up and rebuke the wind and said the waves “*quiet – be still!*” With absolute authority He simply rebukes the wind and the waves - and what happens? Then the wind died down and it was completely calm – with just a word. I want to remind you that all creation came into being with just a word. Then Jesus said to His disciples “*do you still have no faith?*”

If people think Jesus is just a prophet, at the least He is a considerably greater one than Jonah ever hoped to be. But, just as Jonah’s extraordinary adventure was told as a sign that Israel’s God did indeed care for everybody, not just Israel (Jonah’s mission was to save Nineveh, a great pagan city, from imminent judgment), so these remarkable miracles by Jesus are to show that what God was doing through Him and in Him was indeed nothing short of new creation – and complete power of nature and all creation – with just a word. The proper reaction to Jesus is ‘faith’ and so Jesus asks them “*do you still have no faith?*” Jesus asking them about their ‘faith’ is quite simply about a trust, a truth that He is the sovereign One who has authority over all of the elements, and the disciples didn’t have much of this faith. They were so scared that I can imagine the knocking of their knees at one point. I cannot help but think about that trailer we watched from the movie “God is Not Dead.” In it are the signs of people’s faith wavering, succumbing to peer pressure and the culture – and even the threat of a failing grade!

Isn’t it amazing that in the Gospels we see other people like the centurion at Capernaum who asked Jesus to simply say the word for healing – who had a focused and quite striking faith. Here we have Jesus’ own followers, in spite of witnessing all He had done, still did not have the same faith! What about the pagan woman who comes over to Jesus and asks Him to heal her daughter who has been stricken with a demonic spirit. Jesus tells her that they don’t throw their food to the dogs, but she responds “*but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs from their Master’s table.*” Jesus tells her that with such great faith – her daughter has been healed. Jesus wasn’t testing her to see what she would say – but instead He gave her a chance to exercise her faith. They do, however, start to ask questions. What does it mean? What sort of a man is this? They ask each other “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!*”

They obviously regard Jesus as a leader, as ‘Master’; they know He is a healer and teacher, but this goes way beyond anything they possibly could have been expecting. Somehow Jesus’ authority stretches not only to diseases but to the elements as well. They had heard of remarkable healers before, and were prepared to trust and accept that kind of thing – but witness power over the natural elements as well! Calming the storm with just a word? They had to be asking themselves – who is this really?

I believe that Jesus wants us to ask ourselves two questions.

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- First, how do we see Jesus? It's all very well for us to say in church, or in private prayer and devotion, that He is the Son of God, the Lord, and the Messiah. But do we actually treat Him as if He has got authority over every aspect of our lives and our world?
- Second, are we as His followers acting in such a way, in our confrontations with evil, our bold announcements of the kingdom of God, that other people ask themselves about us, saying "What sort of people can they be?" And so ask yourself – Do others see my faith? Do I make them see what I have in Jesus? **Is my faith visible or invisible?**