

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 24, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

“Visible and Questionable Faith”

Believe me - the Galilee is such a beautiful region – and there are times that I daydream and escape there in my mind to the places of the Bible. Having been there in person twice I can tell you of the extraordinary beauty of the sea or lake (it has many names) – and the fishing and agricultural resources that keep this region alive today. The Sea of Galilee is a source of life, even today as its water is pumped out to supply drinking water to the other parts of Israel.

The Jews of Jesus' day were not, for the most part, a seafaring people, they were people of agriculture. Their neighbors to north and south, Phoenicia and Egypt, were nautical nations, with huge navies, who traded across the Mediterranean world and beyond. Israel concentrated on the land, which was their promised inheritance from God to Abraham – farming and fishing in the huge Sea of Galilee or even the Jordan River. Did you know that the Jordan River has two parts to it? It starts at its headwaters in the north, up from Mount Hermon, and some of the higher places to the north. The snow melts and comes down. There is rushing water in the springtime. This water runs into the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful greenish blue. It is magnificent! Then the water comes out of the Sea of Galilee and continues down. Would you believe what it becomes when it gets down to the end? It becomes the Dead Sea! Here is beautiful glacial water, snow water, coming down. Fish are in it in the Sea of Galilee – and then when you get to the Dead Sea – you don't want to swallow it – it is putrid! It is filled with minerals and salts; you cannot swim in it – you can only float. That same life-giving water is part of the Sea of Galilee.

The stories about the sea in the Old Testament, of which there aren't too many of them, make the same point - other larger unknown bodies of water remained, in Jewish writing, a place and a sense of the power of darkness and evil, threatening and wild. 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 sending him back to go do what God wanted him to do in Nineveh. All of that is background to this account from today's Gospel of Mark. The 'whale of a tale' of what happened to the prophet Jonah is worth looking into, to see just what's going on. God told Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh, to the sinful people of 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, Yahweh was 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 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 refused to do what His Father wanted Him to do, but instead it is an additional sign of His own authority. The disciples wake Jesus up, but He doesn't have

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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 Hattin, through which the wind comes swirling through these two peaked mountains with a valley in between. The winds can just come through and down onto the lake in a moments' notice. If you ever go out onto the Sea of Galilee on a boat – you better hold onto your hat.

I literally lost mine while on board the boat and experienced the heavy wind on the lake. Please open your pew Bibles to page 1562 – Mark chapter 4. We can start at verse 37. “*A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*” (Mark 4:37-39) Here is a remarkable sign of Jesus' absolute authority, He simply speaks to the winds and the waves and they quiet down at His command immediately! I don't know about you – but if I were on that boat I would be nervous, for this is a very deep lake. As a matter of fact – the surface of the lake is the second lowest place below sea level on the face of the earth. The lowest is the Dead Sea. There is only one person that we know of whoever walked successfully across it!

During this storm, Jesus was in the stern, or rear of the boat, 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 becomes completely calm – with just those words. I want to remind you that all creation came into being with just a few words. Then Jesus said to His disciples “*do you still have no faith?*”

If people think Jesus is just a nice teacher or a prophet, at the least – they need to think again 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 our Savior, Jesus Christ are to show that what God was doing through Him and in Him was nothing short of new creation – having complete power over nature and all creation – with just a few words. The appropriate reaction to Jesus is 'faith' and so Jesus asks them “*do you still have no faith?*” Jesus' asking them about their 'faith' is 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 - yet. They were so scared that I can imagine their knees were knocking at one point.

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 24, 2018, Year B

I find it amazing that in the Gospels there are people like the centurion at Capernaum who asked Jesus to simply say the word for healing – who had a focused, incredible faith. Here we have Jesus’ own followers, who witnessed every single thing that He had done to this point, and they 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 already been healed. Jesus wasn’t testing her to see what she would say – but instead He gave her a chance to exercise her faith. Then there is the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years who simply wanted to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. She was healed because of her great faith and Jesus told her so. He was on the way to heal Jairus’ daughter who was dying, but He took the time to let her be healed and to hear her story. The men were seeing all of these miracles and finally the Apostles 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!*” What they were seeing was causing them to ask questions. If you remember from last week’s sermon - Jesus was being questionable. In other words – His actions were so unique and so filled with the Spirit – that people wanted to ask questions to Him and about 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 now to the elements as well. They had heard of remarkable healers before and were prepared to trust and accept that kind of thing – but they were witness to His power over the natural elements as well! Who is this that speaks to the wind and the waves; calming the storm with just a word? They had to be asking questions – who is this really?

I want each one of us to ask ourselves – how do you see Jesus? Do you actually treat Him as if He has got authority over every aspect of our lives and our world? It is easy for us to say things like He is the Lord, Master, Messiah and the Son of God – but saying and treating Him like that are two different things entirely.

Next, do a faith checkup – on a scale of 1 to 10 – where is my faith? All of these companies like to do these questionnaires, or surveys – “if you would like to answer a few brief questions – please stay on the line after your conversation with our associate.” Then they ask you questions like “one a scale of one to ten – where did you find the... with the person you were talking to.” People love to give 5 because they don’t want to give anyone a ten! Where is your faith on a scale of one to ten? Do I trust in God to take care of only the big things like sickness, or do I trust Him for and thank Him for the little things? A long time ago I preached a sermon and I said there is a three-word prayer “Help me Jesus!” We like to use that a lot, but there is a very powerful prayer that can be used as well – “thank you Jesus!” Every morning that I am on this side of the grass – I say, “Thank you Jesus.” There is another day that I can serve you, and I can spend time with my family – and I can love you all the more. Help me Jesus and Thank you

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 24, 2018, Year B

Jesus. We love to say thank you for gifts that we get. I just celebrated a birthday on Wednesday, and I got some really nice gifts. I said thank you, and I may write a few notes as well. WE need to say thank you for those things.

Lastly in our 'health checkup' - do others clearly see my faith? Is it visible or am I a 'stealth' or 'undercover' Christian or do I make them see what I have in Jesus? Is my faith visible and questionable? Are people seeing my relationship with Jesus that 'shines?' So people would want to ask me: 'why are you so happy?' 'Why do you seem to be at such peace?' Am I a questionable Christian?

Let me put it to you this way: God wants to give things to you so that He may give things through you – and you will be known as His by your fruit.