

From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...

Sunday, June 21, 2015

Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted

Scripture: Mark 4: 35-41

Sermon: The Challenge of Peace

This story is an after shadowing (a companion piece, if you will) to the story of Jonah. Jonah, you will recall, was sent to Nineveh to tell the people about God. But Jonah fled from God's will and God's purpose for his life. He slept comfortably in a boat while strangers around him were panicked. He got thrown overboard and you know what happened next (don't you?).

Jesus, however, stands starkly in contrast to Jonah, in his story. He sleeps a sleep of peace, not avoidance. Jesus is not fearful and depressed, as we might expect was the case with Jonah. Jesus wasn't lazy (that we know of). Jesus accepted God's will and God's purpose for his life. But Jonah did get it. Jonah came around and followed God's will. He suffered a death of sorts in the whale ("big fish"), then he was saved, or "resurrected" from a watery grave. He was given new life to follow his calling. Jonah surrendered and found peace.

This story was not lost on Mark for the 1st century Christian, who must have felt at times, like they were lost at sea, in danger of persecution, tossed and blown to the extreme. This story was not told to reassure those newly minted followers of the Way that nothing bad would ever happen to them. They were told this story to show the possibility of peace through faith in God (no matter what the circumstances).

A stormy sea is dramatic. There are many stormy seas in life without adding to the drama. But that's what humans do. We suffer unnecessary drama. We are tossed about (all of us), and in our reactions, we get tossed about some more.

The disciples were upset that Jesus seemed unconcerned. They feared for their lives. But when Jesus asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" that shook them up, too. They were in awe... They experienced the fear of the Lord. At least stormy seas were familiar. This was outside the box, outside the boat. It was unsettling, to say the least.

What is the cost of peace? What did the disciples have to give up to experience and to walk in peace?

The remarkable thing about the gospel is that it's always relevant. It is always about today.

You and I are in the same boat as the disciples. We are the disciples. This country is in the same boat as the disciples. The world is in the same boat as the disciples. We are tossing and turning and turning and tossing. The seas are deep, dark, bloated and chaotic. We say we want peace. How do we find it? And do we really want it?

Some of us are hooked on the storm. It is very uncomfortable to live with the lack of chaos, the absence of stress. It can be too much, if we don't take it in little sips, like a drink of water when you are parched in the desert. Little sips of peace. That's all we can take.

Have you ever wonder why people balk at the idea of sitting quietly in prayer or meditation for twenty minutes at a time? It's uncomfortable. But what is so uncomfortable about quietness? What is the problem with sitting quietly and calming the mind and body?

You are I are westerners, first of all. Westerners are doers. We're dominators. We like to accomplish, crash through, make it big, "git 'er done." Jesus says calm down. Jesus says, "Peace be still." You are not in control. I am.

French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal said all of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone. Why is this? Peace is a challenge. A challenge to the soul. Sitting quietly requires that we quiet ourselves inwardly, that we manage our "monkey minds," hopping from place to place, not making a whole lot of sense. Jesus says simply, "Peace. Be still."

In the spiritual curriculum A Course in Miracles, there is a lesson: I could see peace instead of this. Wow. What a way to live, to challenge ourselves to a peaceful way of seeing things and therefore a peaceful way of being in all situations. It's possible.

In our relationships. In our churches. In our country. In our world. The challenge of peace is to give up the drama. Give up being right, having the last word, being the "big cheese." It's honoring everyone with the love of Christ, the love that says, "I am with you. Peace. Be still."

Of course it doesn't mean that nothing bad will ever happen. Look what happened in

Charleston this past week. The best, the most faithful, the kindest of church folks. A horror that no one could have imagined, becoming more and more frequent. Why? Because as a country we cannot seem to meet the challenge of peace. Fear reigns. Violence is the solution of choice in many of our situations today. As if everyone having a gun will establish peace. The stormy seas are preferred to the peace of God. Because, let's face it: we are sometimes as incapable of sustaining peace as we are of sitting quietly in a room for twenty minutes.

These things are connected, my friends. The question I want to pose to all of us today is can we meet the challenge of peace in our worlds? If not in the wide world, then just in our own little worlds. In our homes, in our meetings, in our community and church lives. Can we choose peace instead of stormy seas? Can we listen to the voice of God instead of the listening to the voice of hatred, jealousy, pettiness and greed? Jesus says, yes we can. Jesus says, Peace. Be still.