

**Sunday, June 21, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon- "Peace, Be Still!"**

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Would you be more afraid of a giant enemy, a stormy sea or being in the presence of God?

The disciples were filled with great awe as they asked, "Who, then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The disciples have been listening to Jesus teaching the crowds with his parables. Some of them have been witnesses to miraculous healings.

The message in these stories is certainly about God's presence with us in all circumstances and God's ultimate will for us.

However, it is important that we do not reduce that presence to a warm, fuzzy comfort.

'Yes,' God is always with us and 'yes' God has the power to bring peace into our tumultuous lives – but God is not a hallmark card or a beloved stuffed animal that brings comfort.

When Jesus suggested that the group travel to the other side of the lake, he was inviting the disciples to move out of their comfort zone.

With this invitation he is drawing them from the familiar territory of Capernaum to the strange and foreign land of the Gerasenes.

He is moving them from being fishermen to disciples.

He is preparing them to welcome a kingdom very different from the one they'd either expected or wanted.

The change they are facing is real, and hard, and inevitable, and all of this becomes crystal clear as they realize the one who is asking them to change has mastery over the wind and sea and is, indeed, the Holy One of God.

That change, of course, will also and ultimately be transformative, but I doubt if they see that yet.

It might have been very difficult for those disciples to step into that boat.

Remember many of them are fishermen – they could perhaps tell that there was stormy weather ahead – that the trip would not be easy.

The challenging aspect of an invitation from Jesus is that he doesn't consult with you about whether or not you would like to change.

Left to our own devices, most people would rather stay just where we are.

That's human nature.

We don't like change.

We come up with all sorts of excuses – not yet, the time is not right, we've always done it this way, how do we know what will happen...

We can't seem to hear Jesus' invitation -- "Let us go across to the other side."

In many circumstances we would rather ignore the need for change than make the change happen.

So we sit.

And we wait.

For what? The right time? For someone else to make the first move?

One commentator made this point: "Jesus seems rather dissatisfied with letting us live on one side of the lake for too long. So he takes the disciples to the other side. And getting to the other side is no easy trip. Nor should we expect that to be the case. When we over-sentimentalize or spiritualize this story we end up overlooking the obvious -- that this boat trip was a means by which to get from one place to another – which is the definition of change."

We are only transformed when we leave the familiar and move to new territory.

In a 1928 sermon Dietrich Bonhoeffer "suggested that the tenderness of the Incarnation has left people unable to feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us."

We don't often speak of "fear of the Lord" and I wonder if we understand its deepest meaning?

Think for a moment what it might have been like to be in that boat, tossing and turning in the sea and then complete calm.

Silence! Peace! Be still!

It is in the midst of a dead silence and a stark calm that the seasick disciples learn of the awesome power of God and the divine power of Jesus.

Again, would you be more afraid of the storm or the calm.

In commenting on this text David Lose noted: "People fear miracles because they fear being changed. There is this

kind of fear that stands somewhere between a holy awe and mighty terror: the fear of being changed.

Willingness to change means accepting some level of vulnerability.

We cannot predict with certainty the outcome of any given action, but if we never get in the boat, we will never know what the other side is like.

It is impossible to follow Jesus and remain only where we are comfortable.

Another writer pointed out “The Gospel stories help to shift our values away from a simplistic and naive embrace of all that is rich, dominant and strong, to recognize the power in weakness, simplicity, generosity and collaboration. We need to learn to share power instead of grasping and hoarding it. And we need to learn that all who are truly powerful operate under a higher authority that enables them to use their power for the common good.

We each deal with power relationships on a daily basis – between parents and children, between teachers and students, between citizens and government, between employer and employee, between camp staff and campers.

In some of these relationships we hold power, and in others we don't.

In some we own the “wealth” (be it expertise, opportunity, relationships, material possessions, or money) and in some we are the poor.

The Gospel gives us clear challenges about how we navigate these power dynamics, and reminds us that the ultimate authority to which we answer, and which we are called to imitate, is that of Jesus, who always favors the poor and weak.

On a personal level, our relationships thrive when we embrace mutuality, collaboration, and service.

On a community level, our organizations, churches, schools and neighborhoods thrive when we embrace co-operation, collaboration, service and respect.

How do we learn to use our power wisely and to defer to those more powerful?

I have recently read, *The Road to Character*, by NY Times columnist David Brooks.

I recommend it to you.

Mr. Brooks opens his book by reflecting on the difference between ‘resume virtue’s’ and ‘eulogy virtues.’

The resume virtues are those that you list on your resume, the skills that you bring to the job market and that contribute to external success.

Young David’s ability with a slingshot would be a resume virtue.

“Eulogy virtues are deeper. They’re the virtues that get talked about at your funeral, the ones that exist at the core of your being—whether you are kind, brave, honest or faithful; what kind of relationships you formed.

David's trust in God would be a eulogy virtue. The disciples eventual trust in and love for Jesus would be a eulogy virtue.

The book goes on to examine the paradox of our personalities using a model drawn from a 1965 work by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called *Lonely Man of Faith*.

The premise is that the two creation stories in Genesis "represent the two opposing side of our nature, which he called Adam I and Adam II."

Brooks identifies Adam I as the career-oriented, ambitious side of our nature. "Adam I", he says, "wants to build, create, produce and discover things. He wants to have high status and win victories."

"Adam II wants to embody certain moral qualities. He wants to have a serene inner character, a quiet but solid sense of right and wrong.

Adam II wants to love intimately, to sacrifice self in the service of others, to live in obedience to some transcendent truth, to have a cohesive inner soul that honors creation and one's own possibilities."

We live our lives in the tension between these two beings, wanting to be good, but also wanting to be powerful.

Brook's book explores these tensions and explores the lives of eight people who mastered this tension, achieving greatness while remaining compassionate.

He concludes with a 15 point 'humility code calling on readers to embrace a moral ecology – a set of norms, assumptions, beliefs and habits of behavior that will move our society away from the focus on self – toward a communal understanding of well being.

The fifteen steps are:

1. Live for holiness rather than happiness;
2. Understand that we are flawed creatures with an innate tendency toward selfishness and overconfidence;
3. We are also splendidly endowed creatures able to transform ourselves at any given time;
4. Humility is the greatest virtue. Humility reminds you that you are not the center of the universe, but you serve a larger order;
5. Pride is the central vice which blinds us to the reality of our divided nature;
6. Once the necessities for survival are satisfied, the struggle against sin and for virtue is the central drama of life.
7. Character is built by confronting your own weaknesses. You become more disciplined, considerate, and loving through a thousand small acts of self-control, sharing, service, friendship and refined enjoyment.
8. The things that lead us astray are short term—lust, fear, vanity, gluttony. The things we call character endure over the long term—courage, honesty, humility. People with character are anchored by permanent attachments to important things.

9. No person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. Everyone needs redemptive assistance from outside—from God, family, friends, ancestors, rules, traditions, institutions, and exemplars.
10. We are all ultimately saved by grace.
11. Defeating weakness often means quieting the self. Only by quieting the self, by muting the sound of your own ego, can you see the world clearly.
12. Wisdom starts with epistemological modesty. The humble person understands that experience is a better teacher than pure reason. He understands that wisdom is not knowledge. It is knowing how to behave when perfect knowledge is lacking.
13. No good life is possible unless it is organized around a vocation. If you try to use your work to serve yourself, you'll find your ambitions and expectations will forever run ahead and you'll never be satisfied.
14. The best leader tries to lead along the grain of human nature rather than go against it. A wise leader is a steward for his organization and tries to pass it along in slightly better condition he found it.
15. Maturity is earned not by being better than other people at something, but by being better than you used to be. A mature person possesses a settled unity of purpose and has moved from fragmentation to centeredness.

I share this long list with you to encourage you to think about how you handle both change and power in your lives. What motivates you? Most importantly, if the invitation was offered, would you have the courage to step into Jesus' boat and cross over to the other side?