

III Pentecost (7b)  
June 21, 2009  
Mk 4.35-41  
Fr. Dow Sanderson

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Well, we do not need Bill Walsh nor Tom Crawford (the local weathermen) to tell us that it is hot in Charleston! Hot and humid, troughs and ridges...high pressure and low pressure... and always this time of year... thunderstorms.

At our house we have a very effective *Distant Early Warning system*. Many of you have similar installations. Ours is called Hannah. She, being a Golden Retriever, can hear thunder when it is yet inaudible to the human ear. And the closer it gets, the more anxious energy she both absorbs and conveys. And we being blessed as we are by having such a luxury, note that she most almost always reaches her state of **greatest** agitation around 2:00 in the morning! Those of you who do not own dogs don't know what joys you are missing!

But as anxious as she is, it doesn't take much to give her peace and calm. One touch of a human hand on her little Golden head... and all is right with her world. She will settle down quite contentedly... as long as she knows that someone is there... a reassuring touch. A strong presence of protection against the violent, flashing angry storm... but take away that touch... and she will in an instant revert to her fearful, fallen dog nature.

I suppose the human brain is far evolved and more sensible. We know that we are in safe, secure houses. We know that even if we were dancing in our pajamas with a golf club in each hand wearing Lee Trevino's shoes... even then, the chances of our actually being struck are 1 in 250,000. (That is an actual statistic, I will have you know. I looked it up on the internet, so it has to be accurate).

Last weekend, my boys and some friends camped out on the banks of the Edisto River. After our evening meal, an enormous thunderstorm developed. The rain poured, thunder echoed for the miles down the long riverbed, and lightning crackled all around us... but we felt safe and secure... because we had a millimeter of nylon between us and sudden death!

OK, so maybe the human brain hasn't evolved that much after all... or at least not the *male* human brain...(and on that note... Happy Father's Day guys).

In today's Gospel lesson, we read of more than just a *little* storm. Apparently the storms on the Sea of Galilee were notorious. Even today, observers describe them as coming out of the blue. The high hills and bluffs compress the great winds, and the sea is buffeted mightily, and from several directions at the same time.

Obviously, it would not be a peaceful place for a small boat. So there is little wonder that the disciples were terrified. The storm had taken them completely by surprise, and the danger was very real.

Jesus, meanwhile, is asleep. I love the little details that St. Mark gives us.. *He in the stern of the boat... with his head resting on a cushion*. That, we are told is precisely where dignitaries would have been. Boats of

that era had a little place for guests in the stern, and a carpet would have been there for their comfort. The helmsman stood a little farther forward, in order to have a better view.

The frightened disciples are actually indignant. You can understand that, can't you? Haven't you forgotten yourself when fear overtook you, saying things that ordinarily would have seemed disrespectful or rude?

*Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?*

I have said something quite similar to God when things seemed to be getting a little out of hand! It is a very human response.

Awakened from his slumber, Jesus calmly speaks the words, *Peace. Be Still.*

And it is so. His word always makes it so. *I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Speak the word. That is enough. It will be well.*

This is a very comforting passage. Like the terrified Golden Retriever, all is right with the world as long as the Master's hand is close to us.

And we would like to think that in every storm, the word is always spoken, and peace will come.

But what do we do when the storms come, and they are not rebuked in the way that we would like? What happens when we cry out for the voice of Jesus, and we hear silence?

What happens, when like Job (in our first lesson) we find that every possible evil has overtaken us, and we don't understand why?

Job at least had the courage to ask: *I beg your pardon, Sir. Now that all this has happened. Would you mind, if it is not too much trouble, explaining WHY all this misery has come my way?*

And the voice from the whirlwind... the voice from the great storm itself... sounds like anything but the calm, serene voice of Jesus...

This voice answers: *Where were you when I made the world? Did you hang the stars? Did the great sea creatures obey your voice? Answer me!*

I have said many times before, if I had been Job, this would have been a very unsatisfactory answer. *I am God and you are not* is self-evident. The great injustice of misery and suffering requires more than that rather bland rehearsal of the obvious.

And if that is all that there were to the story, then I suppose we too would be mightily unsatisfied. So unsatisfied with that kind of God that I cannot think of one good reason why we would want to worship and love him...

But we know that it is NOT the end of the story.

For even as the frightful voice demanded answers from Job... *WERE YOU THERE EHN I MADE THE WORLD?...* even then, the eternal Word of God was present within the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

And THAT Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

And THAT WORD took upon himself every possible human emotion: *fear, pain, terror, anger...* All that could touch and torment us... he came to embrace and redeem.

God, who is holier and mightier in his Transcendent Glory than we could ever imagine, has every right to remind us that we are His creatures, even when cannot understand.

But God who is all embracing love gave tangible evidence of that love by coming among us.

And on a particular day, on the Sea of Galilee, the wind and the wave obeyed his voice.

But soon, O so soon, he would himself be taken into the vortex of the dark and violent Storm of human sin. It would toss him into the abyss and unto the very gates of hell.

But he would speak another word, and it would be so: *It is finished.*

The good news for us, my brothers and sisters, is that sometimes in this life, Jesus calms the angry storm. And sometimes, he rides them with us.

But either way, he is always present. Peace. Be still.

Amen. ✠ ✠ ✠