

March 22, 2020

Next week's sermon will be streamed online! I hope you are staying inside and safe. I miss all of you.

~Brenda

Scripture

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

#### *An Interruption*

Life was going along smoothly until a few weeks ago. We worried about things that now seem a bit petty, but then seemed like huge issues. Our denomination was on the brink of dividing over the authority of scripture, with the catalyst being the full inclusion of the LGBTQ community. Our state legislature was arguing divisive transphobic legislation. There were discussions about democratic socialism versus socialism, which candidates we support, national debt, and a border wall. At Hillview, we were discussing what we can do with our backfield, how to pay 100% of our apportionments, storage issues, and how to handle 12-step groups smoking in our parking lot. I never thought I would miss those discussions!

People were sometimes divided and cruel. Our legislature was the only state legislature to pass the horrible transphobic bills and continued discussing and voting on them even during the time when groups were not supposed to meet. They didn't get around to discussing what to do for our state during this pandemic. Our General Conference where the church split was to be decided has been canceled. People once emphatic about no socialism are welcoming the thought of government checks mailed to each person. Our fears of national debt are overshadowed by a recession and a strong possibility of a depression. Hillview is discussing how to pay bills so we have a church building to return to and outreach to the community to support, rather than worrying about apportionments; how to take care of our vulnerable members and constituents, rather than what to do with our property; how to comfort those who are grieving or sick, rather than worrying about smokers in the parking lot. Our priorities have become clearer amid a storm.

A story I heard long ago from my former father-in-law who was born in China has stuck with me. According to Elam, there was a missionary family in China during the revolution who were told they could return to the US. They could only bring 200 pounds of their things with them. They weighed everything important to them very carefully. There were books and toys and

clothing and other items, all weighing exactly 200 pounds. The soldiers returned and asked if they were ready to leave. They said they were, and the soldiers asked, "Have you weighed everything?" They said they had. Then they were asked, "Did you weigh the children?" Suddenly everything else was abandoned as trash as they discovered their priorities.

It feels like we are being forced to make decisions about our priorities as the body of Christ. We cannot be the same church as we have been since the start. We are learning new ways of "churching." We are calling each other to check-in with our friends and family, I am posting a daily devotional on Facebook, we are emailing and mailing the sermons, we are adjusting the community meal to feed people while still keeping them safe, and we are going to be streaming our worship service starting next Sunday. This week we will begin using Zoom to conference call for meetings. Amid the storm, we are discovering who we are.

Romans 8:28 states, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Even though it may feel like Jesus is asleep in our homes as we are confined and isolated, Jesus is still with us and aware of the perils. I believe it is God who is helping us remain as the church during this time, helping us become aware of our priorities of loving each other and loving our community. We don't need to panic and wake Jesus. It is enough to know he is with us, snoozing away.

May the God who calms the wind and the storms bring peace to your heart this day. God is with us. Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,

We look forward to the day when we may all be together again praising you in word, song, and prayer. We pray for those who live alone and who feel lonely or abandoned. Make us aware of your loving presence.

We know there are people in our church and community who are in need. Give them the strength and courage to reach out to us for help. May we have the resources to help them, and to continue in your ministry.

We know there are people in our congregation who are grieving and worried about their health and the health of loved ones. We especially lift before you Dan and Michelle McAlister, Gay Jeffrey, Helen Money, Sherry Teter, Darlene Adams, Patty Zuniga, Gene Hochhalter, Marilesta Nelson, Mark and Hannah, Debbie Mallis' parents, Jon Adamson, and Stephanie King. Even though we cannot give them hugs or hold their hands, may you give us words of comfort and hope to share with them.

We give thanks this day for hotel owners who have opened their doors to the homeless, for churches and community centers and schools still feeding the hungry, for teachers and professors diligently trying to teach online, for parents spending quality and quantity of time with their children, for doctors and nurses and care professionals risking themselves to serve the sick, and for grocery clerks, delivery people, office workers, and all others who continue to work to serve the needs of many. Lord, keep them safe.

We pray all of this, and so much more, in the name of your Son, our Lord and our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

