



Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Kristin Kaulbach Miles Sermon Transcript

“Surviving the Storm: The Three Threads of Our Lifeline”

When one of life’s unavoidable storms arises, “there is a lifeline for you to hold on to” as you make the crossing to the other side, preaches the Rev. Kristin Kaulbach Miles. It comes to us when we ask ourselves three questions: Who am I in the presence of this? What is the “and”? What fear can I let go of? The readings are 1 Samuel 17:57–18:5, 10–16; Psalm 9:9–14; 2 Corinthians 6:1–13; and Mark 4:35–41.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." We each are sitting here, some in our pews or maybe on our couch, maybe some folks are walking while they're listening to this, or by a hospital bed, in our various ways we are connecting to this service, and in our various ways, each of us is in our own metaphorical boat, as the disciples were. Father Mark Bozzuti Jones, in the retreat center reflection for today's gospel, asks, "What is rocking your boat?" I hope that you may take away from this sermon that there is a lifeline for you to hold on to. We hold on when we ask ourselves three questions when a storm arises: who am I in the presence of this? What is the "and"? and what fear can I let go of? When we need a trial, we can ask who am I in the presence of this? Maria Sirois is a positive psychologist, and she wrote a book called "A Short Term in Happiness After Loss." She tells the story of Janine Shepherd, who was an Australian Olympic cross-country skier about to represent her country in the Olympics in 1988, just before.

She was out on a training bike ride, and the utility truck slammed into her. When she awoke, after being in a coma for about 10 days, her spine was completely fragmented. She was told she would not ever walk again. She was completely bereft, alone, and she marveled that people, she would sometimes see others who had similar injuries, and who would never be able to move the way they once were. She marveled that they had a will to go on. They were laid out in this ward where each bed had a mirror above, so you could talk, there were four other people, so you talk to the people, but not really, and you couldn't really see them. One night this nurse came in, and she took a straw, and she just managed to put the straw in each person's hand. She connected the straws around the room until they traversed all the five beds, and she said, "Here you are, you are in this together." That physical connection was a lifeline for Janine, and helped her in that will to live. Who are you in the presence of this?

For some of us, the "this" is a dismissiveness, a scorn, a derision, even a physical threat or violence because we do not align with a dominant view of how we should look, or identify ourselves, or organize our affections. My colleague, the Reverend Mike Qin Min, shared a gorgeous sermon a few years ago, reflecting on David, who we read of in our first reading from 1st Samuel. Mike asked, "Why was it that when David's father, Jesse, was told to bring forth his sons to have a king chosen, he let David be off shepherding? "There was something about David, not just that he was young, as Qin Min points out, he

was different. He didn't fit the prescribed boxes, and this was unsettling to his family, so David is left out in the fields. We see later in today's scriptures, the allusion to intimacy between Jonathan and David. We see later at Jonathan's death, David sing that his love for Jonathan was that surpassing a woman. Though early on, David's family was afraid, and ashamed. It is God who spoke through the prophet Samuel saying to Jesse, "Wait, isn't there another son?" Who are you in the presence of this? God says, "You are loved, you are beautifully made, I seek you out, you are royalty, and you are connected to me." And you are connected to me. The "and" is the next life-line. Paul shows us the "and", in our reading from 2nd Corinthians. Paul does not shy away from his tribulations, and they are daunting: afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonment, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger.

Though it was fashionable for the Stoic philosophers of Paul's time to appear to be unmoved by suffering such as bodily needs and pains, Paul is not a stoic. Whereas the stoic is to be an island of rest in silence, possessing imperturbable happiness, I don't think any reader of the New Testament would say that Paul fits that description. Throughout the scriptures, Paul is cast down, has hardships, feelings of rejection, both body and soul share in the sufferings. Suffering, and trial remain what they are, suffering and trial; Paul confronts them. The virtues: purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, plus the holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, for him, point to an inner activity within the suffering that brings an end. We know that there is no life in which happiness and suffering exist apart from one another. There is pain and we take the next breath. We face crippling grief and grasp at a straw that connects us. There is dying and life is present. We come to our third question; the third thread that makes our life-line. After asking, who are we in the presence of this?

After asking, what is the "and", we ask: what fear can I let go of? On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." What do you need to go across? What do we need to cross as a church, a city, a nation or world? Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid?" Just before this story in Mark, Jesus had been teaching through parables, and now the disciples themselves are the parable, the parable of a group of people invited to cross over in their humanity. Jesus has them leave a predominantly Jewish section of Galilee, to go by sea to the eastern coast, to the gentile region. In this parable, the disciples find that there is a storm; there is churning and choppiness. There is a disturbance in the force, when they are expected to go beyond the limits that they have set for themselves, and for Jesus, in terms of the good work they are called to do, and who is worthy to be served. This is not a new story. The Hebrew scriptures have pointed out to us before, the resistance that happens when we are asked to transcend divides. Jesus' call to witness to the salvation and love of God beyond tribalism is an old theme, though hauntingly, and direly acute in our times. Let us go over to the other side.

The writer of Mark makes clear the parallel of the unwilling disciples crossing the sea with a story of Jonah, the prophet who resisted the call to preach forgiveness and repentance to foreigners. Jonah fled from his mission because he was unconcerned with the fate of those suffering oppression in the imperial state of Nineveh. Jonah, like our disciples, was caught up in a storm of his own making. It says, the disciples are filled with great fear, and I was reminded in a Bible commentary that the Greek words are, "phobos megas." One doesn't need to be a Greek scholar to figure out that phobos megas is something that characterizes too much of our lives in society, great phobias. We have sympathy for these disciples. We know what it's like to be buffeted by wind, and waves that assail our fragile vessels. Here is our life-line as we make the crossing, to ask ourselves three questions: Who are we in the presence of this? What "and" can we add when the whole of our lives becomes defined by one situation or one outcome? What fear can we let go off? A spiritual teacher once said to me, 'the part of you that knows you're afraid isn't afraid.' Let us go together, let us go in our own lives, let us make the journey to the other side. Amen.