

“Peace!”

Mark’s brief account of how Jesus and his disciples approached their experience of the storm on the lake provides us helpful insights into our confrontations with hardships, difficulties, suffering, fears, and death. Last Sunday, as I reviewed the Bulletin Cover for today and decided on the Hymns, Call To Worship, and Sermon Title, it seemed my message for today would be straight forward on the subject of Shalom – Peace, which would also be connected to God’s Ultimate Purpose of bringing about the liberation of Creation from its bondage to decay along with its *“sharing in the glorious freedom of the Children of God,”* as the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8. However, the tragic events in Charleston, South Carolina, on Wednesday night, shined the light on our more immediate need!

CNN reported the following took place on Thursday in response to the mass murder of 9 persons in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, “Any death of this sort is a tragedy. Any shooting involving multiple victims is a tragedy,” said Obama, as Vice President Joe Biden stood alongside him. **“There is something particularly heartbreaking about death happening in a place in which we seek solace and we seek peace.”**

After that heartbreaking terrorist attack in a predominately Black Church by a young white supremacist, the Sermon Title, Scripture, Hymns, and Call To Worship remained the same but the timeliness of the subject of Peace has a greater urgency. First, notice our Gospel Lectionary Reading from our Pew Bibles – the Good News – Today’s English Version, does not include a quote with the word, *“Peace”*, which is so prominent on the cover of today’s bulletin. The bulletin cover’s quote comes from the King James Version. **Our Pew Bible’s quotation from Mark 4:39 is “Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, ‘Be quiet!’ and he said to the waves, ‘Be still!’ The wind died down, and there was a great calm.”** Let me suggest that “great calm” was a powerful manifestation of the Peace or Shalom Jesus brought about on that stormy night of our Scripture Reading. Yet, during that same experience, Jesus confronted the failure of his disciples to live out Peace and Faith.

Assuming Jesus was correct in his analysis of the situation, let’s closely examine what today’s Scripture reveals about the disciples and our common experience. According to Mark, Jesus’ original disciples had already witnessed him working numerous miracles of healing. They also heard him share many parables and teachings – even before a large crowd. Indeed, Jesus had done so much, he must have been simply exhausted. **In Mark 4:35-36, it is reported, “On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let us go across to the other side of the lake.’ So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them.”** We know from verse 38, *“Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow.”* So, Jesus was with them in the boat but the violent storm seemed to erase all of their knowledge about their sleeping Teacher.

He was astonished by their failure to grasp the full picture of their situation. **In verse 40, “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?’”** Now, we have all found ourselves momentarily distracted by fear or emotion when we felt threatened or under attack. Sometimes, we even have at hand what we need to eliminate the danger or challenge but are so disoriented, it may take a few minutes or more to recognize how to overcome our difficulties in the moment. However, as the gospels frequently demonstrated, the original disciples of Jesus were especially slow to comprehend his message, purpose, and identity.

I am not exaggerating the disciples’ faults, as was demonstrated in our Reading. For example, after the storm manifested great power and danger, Mark explained in verse 38, *“The disciples woke him up and said, ‘Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to die?’”* They had not forgotten Jesus was with them during the storm on the lake. Instead, they acknowledge him merely as their Teacher. It was a significant role of authority but being their teacher, alone, was not a true representation of their experience of Jesus’ healings and insights. Note, they did not wake Jesus up and beg him to calm the storm – to bring Peace to Creation and themselves.

To the contrary, they belittled his concern about them and impugned his ability to do much to help or save them from the danger provided by the storm – *“don’t you care that we are about to die?”*

It was after the disciples demonstrated such little regard for Jesus’ commitment to them, along with their devaluation of his meager resources to save them that Jesus acted to remove the danger and exposed their fears and their lack of trust and faith in him. Mark stated in **verses 39-40**, *“Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, ‘Be quiet!’ and he said to the waves, ‘Be still!’ The wind died down, and there was a great calm. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?”* Please note Jesus did not say “you still have little faith” but *“you still have no faith”*. Indeed, the original disciples demonstrated very little to no faith until after the crucified Jesus appeared to them as their Resurrected Christ and Son of God!

Ironically, the fears of the disciples were not fully and completely quelled by Jesus calming the storm! Mark described their continued failure to recognize Jesus, especially his authority and identity, as he wrote in **verse 41**, *“But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, ‘Who is this man?’”* The comments of the disciples were more a matter of fear or dread than reverence for the Son of God. **As I indicated earlier, it was only after seeing and interacting with the Risen Messiah – Jesus, the Gospel of John reported in 20:28, “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”**

Immediately after Thomas’ declaration about Jesus’ authority, purpose, and identity, the Gospel of John quoted Jesus in **20:29**, *“Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”* Because we have been given the Gifts of Faith, the Holy Spirit, and the multitude of Testimonies in the gospels and in the letters in the New Testament, you and I can believe without seeing the Risen Jesus Christ! The original disciples may have had a good excuse for not trusting and faithing in Jesus’ authority, purpose, and identity because he had not yet been executed and raised from the dead. That can no longer be a good excuse for us so, we are brought back to what happened in the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston on Wednesday evening of this past week.

There was a terrible storm in that Bible Study! The Pastor and several other ordained ministers were there, united with Jesus and the other members of that group. From numerous news sources, we learn the storm was created by the entrance of a white supremacist racist bent on hateful murder. He even wore patches, which indicated solidarity with the philosophies of discredited white racist apartheid regimes of the past from southern Africa. The members of that church group were gracious and loving toward him, so much so, he considered abandoning his intended murderous plan. Every contributor to this murderer’s racism and violent anger – from internet posts, to cable television’s racist misrepresentations, to whatever white supremacist groups or individuals who encouraged his racial hatred – they all have a share in his murderous guilt. Comfort may come to us by recalling the final response of the People in today’s Call To Worship. Clearly, Jesus was with those who would become victims of the murderer and our Savior and Lord fulfills their joy, hope, and love in God’s Kingdom. The relatives of those killed have shown remarkable grace and forgiveness toward the perpetrator of the crime – they have the deep Peace which comes from our union with Jesus Christ! Unfortunately, whether consciously or unconsciously, the murderer came to kill Jesus’ Body – the Church and he hoped his murderous actions would start a civil war.

You and I are to trust – have faith in Jesus’ loving presence being with us. We are to live without fear, for we know God will reunite us with our departed loved ones and all who have died in the Lord. Finally, on this Fathers’ Day Sunday, all of the men of this congregation are reminded of the important role they, like the women of this church have, in the raising, loving, and nurturing of our children. **Each of us have both the wonderful opportunity and responsibility to encourage our children to belong to Jesus and the Peace – Shalom we have with and through him.** Let’s make sure any child, who comes into our midst will be affirmed, while being encouraged to reject racial hatred and all violence related to it. **Let us be at Peace with our God, one another, and all people!** Amen.