

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
Proper Seven
Holy Comforter Episcopal Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
June 21, 2009

On Tuesday morning I asked the ‘Brunch Bunch’ what they thought about this gospel. We had a good discussion and we generated some ideas and lots of questions? One of the questions was: what happened to the other boats? I don’t know. It only says they took Jesus out in a boat and “Other boats were with him.” So we are left with the questions – did the other boats suffer in the storm – did Jesus calm their waters also. Did they know what had happened and who was responsible? We don’t know do we?

I told the group that I remembered a sermon given some time ago about this gospel. It was a June Sunday in 2003.

Here is the scene; I was, as they say these days, kicked back on Sunday morning June the 8th, 2003. I am enjoying my second cup of Starbucks before getting ready to come to church. I turn the page of the paper and the headline jumps out at me. Though I am completely alone, I say out loud “O _____” (expletive!) Now, I know that may surprise some of you who do not know me; (those of you who do know me are not surprised at all.)

The headline says something like “Openly Gay Priest Elected Bishop of New Hampshire.” The article goes on to say that The Rev. V. Gene Robinson has been elected bishop of New Hampshire on Saturday, June 7th.

The reason for my expletive may not be what you are thinking. I did not care that Gene Robinson was gay and I did not care that he was elected bishop. No, my concern centered around having to deal with the reaction and divisiveness that is bound to follow. My

first thought, after the profane, was “O boy, here we go again. Just what we need, another controversy.”

Of course what has brought this up for me again is the fact the General Convention of the Episcopal Church is about to convene in Anaheim, California. And you never know what is going to come up.

You see I really don't like controversy. Some who have known me for a long time might snicker at that statement. So, OK, I do not like controversy that I do not cause. I mostly like for everybody to be happy. I love it when folks are laughing and enjoying themselves, when church is fun and when all the problems seem solvable and the call to ministry is a call to wholeness and health in a way that nobody feels threatened or left out.

I love it when the waters are calm and the sailing is smooth.

Folks can get pretty worked up over a lot of issues and certainly sexuality is a hot-button issue. And, let's face it; folks can get pretty upset if they think their clergy are talking about issues that might be construed as controversial.

And so I said “O (expletive)” and I will probably say it again, because I don't want to deal with whatever comes up that is controversial.

Like I said, I really love it when the waters are calm and the sailing is smooth.

But after saying that, the thought comes, “...and just when was that?”

In any event I am probably like the disciples who are in the boat with Jesus this morning. They did not sign up for a rough ride.

They just want some smooth sailing away from the crowds and to get across the lake to a quieter shore. But of course that is not what they get. What they get is a windstorm and waves beating the boat and the boat filling with water and they are afraid.

Finally someone – or several someone(s) decide to awaken Jesus. He is asleep in the stern of the boat. (Is that the back or the front?) The disciples did not wake Jesus in a manner akin to your friendly wake up call from room service. “Jesus, do you not care we are perishing?”

Jesus calms the storm and the text says that the disciples “...were filled with great awe...” ---- I’ll bet they were. For you see they now are confronted with the awesome power of God in the form of a human person.

The disciples are afraid and confused. This is consistent with Mark’s portrayal of the disciples as lacking understanding about the true nature of Jesus. They just don’t get who he is and what he is. One commentary says: “The storm is frightening to be sure, but they are in the presence of a power greater than the storm.”
(Preaching through the Christian Year, Craddock, etal, Page 321)

And perhaps that is apropos, for we too, often do not understand who and what Jesus is. Our faith is often too small and our ability to function limited in the midst of our storms. Our fears often limit our vision and our belief. We become paralyzed (or calcified) and are unable to move or act. We often just react and try to find the old familiar ways of dealing with anxiety.

We see a conflict coming and think: “Circle the wagons, here it comes!”

Jesus might say to us this morning --- (to me) --- “Why are you afraid, have you no faith?”

Why am I afraid of a new controversy? Is it because I do not feel qualified to deal with the issue? Is it because I am worried that people might disagree with my opinion and thus reject me? Is it because I am afraid that people will leave the church and try to find a faith community that agrees with their particular point of view? Is it 'all of the above?'

Probably, but let me tell you something – good people. Did you notice that when the disciples were afraid and the boat was rocking, no one left the boat? Did you notice that even after being rudely awakened and disappointed in the disciples fear and lack of faith, Jesus did not toss anybody out of the boat?

No one got into one of those other boats we were wondering about.

We, like the disciples, are in this boat together.

We do and will have differences over issues. Some of them will really be storms. Yes, folks we have our differences, but we are in the boat together.

Our baptism into Jesus Christ is inseparable from our communion with one another, and we commit ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion ...”

We are in this boat together.

We will always have differences and divisions among ourselves, but we are promised in II Corinthians 5: 17 that if we are in Christ --- there will be a new creation --- That is right, if we are in Christ -- there will be a new creation ---- the old passes away, everything becomes new!

Jesus says, “Why are you afraid, have you no faith?” In other words, we should never sell God short --- even in the midst of things that make us uncomfortable, even in the midst of disagreements and differences of opinion on right courses of action, God can and will come to us, give us new learning, new insight.

We are in the boat together. It is time to put aside our fears and stop concentrating on that which divides us and keeps us out of communion with one another.

In fact the churches in this community would do well to stop worrying about those issues and changes in the church and start worrying more about the fact that there is a 85% increase in the demand for homeless services; a 23% increase in requests for Medicaid eligibility; a 48% increase in requests for assistance from Crisis Assistance Ministry; and a rise of 39% in the applications for Food Stamps.

Those are the arena(s) in which we are apt to find Jesus as opposed to the angst over church issues.

It is time to realize that our unity is at the table where Christ offers himself --- our unity is not in agreement on issues, but in Christ and his saving sacrifice for all people, all races, all classes.

As Paul says in his letter to the Galatians: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; (can you read ‘Gay or Straight?’) for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Like the great hymn says: “In Christ there is no East or West In him no North or South but one great fellowship of love through out the whole wide earth.”