

# THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“Faith Not Fear”

Mark 4:35-41

The novel entitled, *“The Color Purple,”* by Alice Walker is a collection of letters written by a young black woman name Celie about her life in the rural south. Each of her letters begins “Dear God” and each one describes how her childlike faith in Him is shaken by repeated atrocities like her father being lynched, her mother going mad, and her own abuse and rape. And as her life falls apart she writes a “Dear God” letter that concludes “you must be asleep.”

“God, you must be asleep.” I wonder how many times, in the midst of some crisis of our own, we might have felt like saying the same thing. We, who are usually so at home with God here at church, talking with Him as if He were our best friend sometimes find ourselves in situations during the rest of the week where we may wonder if God rally hears us at all. Most of us live a few dollars away from financial problems, one drunk driver away from an accident, a few germs away from a serious illness. We are a people who, by nature, live on the edge. But that’s not all bad because living on the edge reminds us maybe we’re not quite as self-sufficient or in control as we would like to think we are sometimes. And, in that, we are reminded today that the God who has made us His own by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is with us in those crisis situations and we can go to Him for help like a child goes to a loving parent.

But when God doesn’t respond in the way we think He should, when He doesn’t snap to attention or leap to our aid as quickly as we might like Him to, when we feel alone and vulnerable, as though we were in a small boat on a great sea being tossed about on the waves of a storm, we too might feel like saying, “God, you must be asleep.”

Our Gospel lesson for this Third Sunday after Pentecost speaks to that very feeling. The Bible tells us that Jesus had been teaching all day beside the Sea of Galilee. The crowds that had come out to hear him were so large that he was forced into a small fishing boat so that he might be able to speak to them all about the Kingdom of God. And then, at dusk, he and his disciples weighed anchor and began to head across that sea to the other side. Suddenly, a storm arose – as storms on seas are wont to do – and the little boat was tossed here and there, up and down, so much so that it began to take on water. And the disciples were afraid. And rightfully so. And just where was Jesus during all of this? Why, he was in the stern, fast asleep!

His disciples woke him with a shout – “Don’t you care if we drown?” they yelled – a seemingly legitimate question under the circumstances. And then, the Bible says, Jesus rose, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” And miraculously everything was at peace once again. And then he turned his attention to his disciples and asked them a question, “Why were you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

It's been said that the first church to hear the Gospel according to Mark and, of course, this particular account of Jesus stilling the storm was the church at Rome. It too was facing a storm. Nero was persecuting the church and Christians were being tossed to the lions right and left. Peter had been crucified upside down and Paul had been beheaded. And where was Jesus during all of this, they must have thought. Is he sleeping? Why was he allowing this to happen to them? Didn't he care? Of course, he cares, Mark says. He's not sleeping. He is with you as surely as he was with his first disciples on the Sea of Galilee and he will still your storm just as surely as he stilled theirs. So don't be afraid, even if you face death, Mark says, only have faith. And many in the church at Rome believed and took comfort and strength in these words and they weathered the storms they had to face without losing faith even if it meant death for some of them.

And now Mark's account of Jesus stilling the storm comes to us. We, too, find ourselves caught up in the storms of life – some like those Christians in Rome because we too are Christians and some like those first disciples simply because we are human --but storms nonetheless. And in the midst of these storms we too might be tempted to be afraid and to forget that Jesus is not sleeping but that He is still with us – with us in the very midst of our trials and troubles and tribulations – with us sharing our difficulties and whether we see it or not, with us working out all things for our good.

Elie Wiesel, in his book entitled, "*Night*", tells of his experience in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. One such experience involved the hanging of a young boy. Being forced to stand there and watch along with the rest of the camp, Wiesel heard someone behind him say, "Where is God now?" to which Wiesel replied, "Where is He? He is here – hanging on the gallows."

That, in a nutshell, is the message of the Incarnation and, indeed, the crucifixion of Jesus even today. God has come in our midst in the person and work of His Son not only to save us from our sin but also to give us peace in the midst of the storms of life through him and his continuing presence among us. Indeed, Christ has literally assumed the storms of our life himself in order to redeem them as well and, in that, not to simply take them away but to strengthen us in faith through them.

To the question of "where are you God? Are you sleeping?" God says in Christ, "No, I'm not sleeping. I'm here with you. And I'll be with you to the end." God is indeed with us in the midst of whatever storm you and I may be experiencing today. He is in the midst of His people by the power of His Spirit in Word and Sacrament. And He is in our midst today saying to each and everyone of us who are gathered here in his name the very same thing that he said to his first disciples in our Gospel lesson for today – "Peace! Be still! Don't be afraid! Have faith!"

May God help us to hear His word of promise again this morning, take it to heart, believe it, and hold on to it no matter what may come our way this week. And may He help us to that end for Jesus' sake. Amen.