

Pentecost 4

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Recently, I was told about a boating event that happened some years ago. The incident occurred following a day of cruising on our beautiful Pamlico River and Sound. Sun-weary and tired, several couples were on a good size boat returning to Washington after an exciting time of fishing, that included catching a shark. All were enjoying the companionship of good friends when they suddenly felt a tremendous jolt and a shearing, deafening noise. I guess the skipper and the others were not paying as close attention as they should have, because they ran smack dab into a large channel marker, ripping a substantial gash into the boat. The boat began to swiftly take on water. The occupants quickly figured out they were in deep trouble, believing the boat was sinking with everyone on board, as well as that shark flopping around the deck.

The skipper quickly put out a May Day SOS distress call, pleading with the Coast Guard to make haste to save them. These folks were in fear for their lives. The anxious, excited skipper kept begging, shouting for the Coast Guard to hurry, and hurry faster, not allowing the radioman to get a word in. Finally, the exasperated radioman interrupted the skipper saying that the channel marker they hit was right across from the Coast Guard station and the rescue team was only moments away from reaching them to get everyone to safety. Waiting to be rescued in all the uncertainty that surrounded these people was almost unbearable.

Now, these frightened boating folks for the most part were all God-fearing church people and I suspect there was a lot of praying going on for God to rescue them from the perils of the sea. As fate would have it the Coast Guard arrived in a timely way to rescue these people, but not the boat. It is my understanding that the shark, taking advantage of his circumstances, got away!

I imagine that many of you have had some experience of being out on our Pamlico River, enjoying the wonderful, cooling breeze refreshing you as you relish the bright sunshine warming you, watching the mullets jumping, or dolphins circling the boat. You are likely very content, if not in your happy place. It may seem like an idyllic, perfect day in paradise, until the winds suddenly shift, kicking up high waves. Dark clouds swiftly crowd out the overhead sun. A piercing boom

of thunder followed quickly by flashes of lightning informs you that your time in paradise has come to an abrupt halt. The storms that form when we are not paying attention are truly startling because they seem to come out of nowhere.

I suspect this scenario is just what the disciples experienced – but with an added dimension. Although the disciples were a relatively newly formed collection of men gathered around Jesus, they already had experiences with just what he can do. In their fear and uncertainty, the disciples do what most of us would do, which is to awaken their sleeping leader, Jesus, who seems to be oblivious to the crisis the disciples find themselves in. Somewhat perturbed, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Suddenly, the rocking sea calmed and the storm moved on. Then Jesus chastised the disciples for their lack of faith. In reading the narrative, it is hard to tell if the disciples were more afraid of the swift violent storm they are caught up in or the miracle of calming the waters? When you read a little deeper into this story, what we find is the disciples moved from fear into faith.

When you think about it, both fear and faith come together only when they are connected by the unknown, demanding, arduous, or intimidating and any of these things are very scary for most of us. But then, these are the very same things that call upon our faith so we can face the challenges and uncertainties in life. Jesus leaves these disciples in awe, holy awe, as they wonder “who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?” We know that the disciples watched Jesus perform numerous miracles, yet they still cannot phantom what to expect, or even just who Jesus really is. All the disciples really know is that somehow God is involved as they each moved from fear to faith.

Lutheran pastor, David Lose, wonders what it is that moves us from fear to faith. He indicates that the impetus for changes is based on relationships. What matters is that faith is not about believing certain things such as when or how the world was created, or who wrote the Bible, or how Mary gave birth if she was a virgin. Lose tells us, “Faith is about a relationship, a relationship with God revealed by the ministry and words and actions of Jesus.” Jesus is persistent in his longing concern and care for all of us. Jesus is determined to reveal God’s loving promise to set free all people from the things that prevent us from living life abundantly. Jesus asks us to trust. Ultimately, trust is truly the only thing that overcomes fear.

This morning I remind you of God's steadfast love that is always present in our lives. It is that very love that calls, if not screams out to us not to just live, not to just get by, but rather to abundantly flourish. It is that all-powerful love that encourages us, as David Lose says, "to dare great things, expect great things, ask for great things, and share great things." If this is the kind of life you envision for yourself, pray for greater faith. Thanks be to God.

Amen.