

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL & ACNA Readings – Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

Introduction. When the outcome of something that we are going through is unsure, be that an event, a struggle or a trial, then a horrible feeling can come upon us, uncertainty. This is potentially one of the scariest feelings that we can face. Trusting in God is often easier when times are good. When times are difficult, it is even more important for us to trust in God. Our lectionary readings highlight that it is during the difficult times that our trust should be in the certainty of God.

Common Theme. Storms and struggles against the sea are common images in the lectionary this week. Life is rarely a tranquil journey or a calm voyage. Instead, life is usually full of storms. Storms can be character building or potentially faith shattering. In our readings we see God speaking within them, ruling over them, rescuing people from them and commanding them to cease. Sometimes storms are necessary for God to get our attention and help us to see or hear clearly from the Lord.

Job 38:1-11. Job is an interesting character in the Bible. He is not Jewish, nor is he an Israelite. He lives in the land of Uz and not in Canaan. The book itself is assigned to Wisdom literature and is placed next to the Psalms and not in the historical writings. Ezekiel 14:14 describes Job, along with Noah and Daniel, as one of the three ancient men of renown. Job is aware of the Lord, who calls him his servant, and Job offers sacrifices for the sins of his children. In Job 38, God, who has not spoken for some 35 chapters, comes to address Job from the midst of the storm. The word סַעַר (*sa'ar*) can also be translated as “whirlwind”; it is a world of chaos. God’s appearing in a storm before Job may have caused some extra consternation as Job’s children had been slain by a mighty wind in 1:19. One of the issues of the book concerns the suffering of the righteous and the question of why God permits evil. However, as God speaks from the storm, nowhere does he explain the meaning of suffering. Instead, what we discover is simply and certainly that God is in control of the chaos. Verses 8-11 describe God as “shutting up” or “hedging in” the sea. Here we see that God confines the waters of chaos, giving them boundaries that they may not cross over. This is possibly a reference to God’s actions with the waters during creation. What God reveals to Job from the midst of the storm is that he is creator and sustainer and that he is the only certain thing in the universe.

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32. The opening verses of this psalm describe the return of God’s people from the diaspora. Thanks and praise are offered to the Lord for his goodness, seen through the redemption and ingathering of the exiles. Some of the returnees come back in ships from distant lands across the sea, so this psalm has become a favourite of sailors. The seafarers encounter a storm (v. 25). It is a violent storm, and they are tossed about “reeling like drunkards” (v. 27) and are in danger. Listening to their cries, the Lord intervenes and calms the waters so that they become still. This has obvious connections to Jesus in Mark 4, where he calms the storm by the words “Be still.” The storm itself can even be said to have been formed by the Lord (v. 25). The psalm reminds us that God is in control of everything,

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even the dangerous things that are in our lives. The good news is that he is listening to his people and rescues them when they are in distress.

2 Corinthians 6:1-13. Paul cites a passage from Isaiah 49, a verse of prophetic salvation to Israel, who resides in captivity in Babylon as a result of their sins. Despite Israel having forsaken the Lord, God remains faithful to his covenant and promises a return to the land at the “acceptable” or “favoured” time. Paul says to the Corinthians that the acceptable time of redemption and fulfilment of the promise is now. Now is the day of salvation! Paul then defends his ministry by citing some of the hardships and distress that he has had to endure. Some commentators see this as Paul contrasting his sufferings with the Greek stoic belief that trials strengthen virtue. Others see Paul joining in with the sufferings of the Messiah. In context with our other readings, Paul is saying that God is still working amidst the chaos. When things were looking bad for Paul, he still knew that God was in control, bringing clarity and certainty to his troubles. Sometimes the truth and hope of the gospel are seen through a believer’s response to suffering and opposition. When something is bad, there is something good there, too. As Paul says, “Unknown yet known, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing yet possessing everything.” Despite the troubles faced by the Corinthian community, the time of favour is still now!

Mark 4:35-41. Jesus does not perform superfluous acts of power, and this miracle of calming the storm is not simply here to amaze the disciples. The disciples enter the boat at the command of Jesus, who sends them on this journey across the Lake of Galilee. God is in control, and Jesus has the disciples exactly where he wants them. A chaotic, furious storm of unknown origin appears. The Gospel passage does not imply the storm is demonic or unnatural in any fashion. However, the boat is in serious danger, and the experienced fisherman are very concerned. Jesus is asleep through all this; the storm has not woken him—not the waves crashing over the boat, nor the struggles of the disciples against the storm. What wakes him are the cries of distress from the disciples. This is a comforting thought, that God always hears us in our times of distress.

Jesus gives us a demonstration of his power and reveals that he is more than a miracle worker. Jewish people would recall other water events where God intervened in human affairs, such as the Exodus and the story of Jonah. Both are stories of hope and redemption—Exodus for the Jewish people and Jonah for the Gentiles of Nineveh. The Spirit of God brooded over the waters at Creation, and the Psalms declare God’s dominion over the seas. Subtly, Jesus reveals his divine nature through this divine action. The sacred history displayed in the Bible reveals to us that God is in control of all things, and he is the only certain thing in an uncertain world. The question remains for us, if we believe in God and know he is in control, why do doubts descend upon us in times of distress? Jesus asks this of his disciples. This is not a rebuke of the disciples; the rebuke was to the storm.

In Jewish tradition, you teach by asking questions. In today’s Gospel, Jesus asks why they are afraid, and where is their faith? Jesus does not go into a sermon about the relationship between fear and faith,

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nor about his power over nature as a sign of his divine nature. We learn again from this story that even though we might be afraid, we actually have nothing to fear. Even though we sometimes have doubts, our faith can be certain in the certainty and sovereignty of God. We can be assured that when calling out to the Lord, he will hear and rescue us in our distress. It's his character; it's his goodness, and he is always faithful.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.