

Worship: March 22, 2020 McGuire United Methodist Church

Greeting: Greetings from McGuire United Methodist Church. I am Rev. Frances Hooton. Thank you for worshipping with us today. Welcome to our service with one another this day.

Light a candle: We light this Christ candle to remind us that Jesus is with me and Jesus is with you. And if Jesus is with us all then we really are not that far from one another. We are the Body of Christ – the Church.

Opening Prayer: Gracious and Good God, come and meet us in this place. Open our hearts and minds so that we are free to worship you. We are here to give you the glory honor and praise. Bless our time with one another, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ who is our risen Lord and Savior.

Announcements:

- The church will continue to be closed for face to face worship and small groups until this crisis is over and the Center for Disease Control and the Governor of the State of Louisiana lifts the prohibition of group meetings. I remind you that the first two cases of COVID-19 have been diagnosed in Ouachita Parish so please, please STAY Home. This situation is very real.
- During this season of social distancing there will be at least one video from McGuire each day. Going forward it will be a combination of Daily Inspirational devotions, stories for children, wisdom for families and worship services. Each day either Jordan or I will post. So stay tuned to the McGuire Facebook page to stay connected to our church.
- In addition there will be an e-mail on Monday, a phone tree on Tuesday, a phone tree on Thursday followed by an e-mail on Friday. Tomorrow the manuscript of this service will be e-mailed, placed in the regular mail, and posted to our Web-page.
- The church office will be open 8 a.m. to noon Monday through Thursday and you can contact me day or night through my cell phone, e-mail, or Facebook messenger.
- Please continue to support our congregation financially. You can mail your offering to the church or give electronically on the church's web page. Here is the Hooton tithe and as soon as service is over I am going to place it on Kathy's desk. I am showing you this because God calls me to lead by example.

And now let us affirm our faith with the...

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of the saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:23-27

Sermon: Peace, Be Still: I have read Bible stories to children who attend the Day cares and Preschools that have been located in the churches I have served for years. When I was at FUMC Many I read to the Sunshine Kids. A version of this Scripture is in Ella K. Lindvall's 1982 Children's book *Read aloud Bible Stories Volume 1*. It is illustrated by H. Kent Puckett.

Ross was four when he heard this story for the first time during chapel. His mother told me the next Sunday that Ross came home from school that day and stood up on the couch crying out to Toledo Bend (this family lived on the lake) Peace, Be Still. Just like Ross we all want Jesus to calm the stormy seas of life.

When life is troubled and the storms of life rage around us we want Jesus to take the storm away.

But the point of this story is not that Jesus could control the forces of nature. The point of this story is that the disciples of Jesus were still not living and practicing mature Christian faith and discipleship.

Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a fishing boat.

A boat large enough for at least 13 grown men. It was powered by both sails and oars.

Josephus an ancient historian wrote that there were usually 300 boats on these waters. During a storm the sails would be lowered so that the wind would not rip them. This made the boat easier to control. However, the Sea of Galilee is an unusual body of water. It is relatively small. 13 miles long. 7 miles wide. It is 150 feet deep. Finally it is 680 feet below sea level.

Sudden storms can appear as if out of the blue because they appear suddenly over the surrounding mountains. So it was with little warning that the disciples the stirring of the waters into violent 20 foot waves. You see the disciples were caught without warning. The danger is great.

This band of men, most of whom were fishermen were not foolish. They understood the Sea of Galilee. Most of them had probably traveled on this body of water many, many more times than Jesus. They were not foolishly caught unaware, storm like this occasionally just happened on the Sea of Galilee.

This sounds very familiar to me. COVID-19 has been in the news for months.

But at the beginning of the year it was something happening in China.

It has been more on my radar since late February when I read a blog about getting my congregation prepared for and having a COVID-19 plan. On March 4th this got more serious because I was sent an article on how to service Holy Communion in a healthier way.

It began to hit me what we were up against when I learned that there were cases in New Orleans.

Then on March 12th – Thursday, March 12th the church got a phone call from Ridgecrest. Our 40 year old weekly worship service at the Nursing Home was canceled until further notice. The whole facility was quarantined.

On Friday March 13th – I learned that I could no longer visit in the hospitals either.

The church leadership decided to cancel face to face worship for 2 Sundays.

Then the Governor – closed the schools for a month.

By Saturday, March 14th this season of Social Distancing to flatten the curve had begun.

Since then I have stayed home, gone to the church to film videos and then go home again.

Although the disciples had witnessed many miracles they panicked during the storm.

Where was Jesus? What was Jesus doing?

This group was mainly fisherman; so in this situation professional sailors were looking to Jesus for answers.

This was not their first storm. They knew the dangers of the Sea of Galilee. They had managed to get the boat

home through many a storm. Was this storm really so bad? What this storm really so different? They had been in this danger before. They should have known what to do.

But they freaked out! They were anxious and afraid. They cried out to Jesus.

Hey, where was Jesus? Jesus was out like a light. He was in deep, restorative sleep.

If the disciples are in mortal danger why is Jesus sleeping? They begin to wake up Jesus. Anxious and frantic. They are frightened. They fear that they are going to drown.

I pause here and say that as I read this passage this week. I see it differently. This week I see this experience as a kind of beta test for the disciples. In terms of technology, a beta test is a test run to see if a new computer program or piece of technology actually works before it is released to the general public. No I do not believe that God tests us in this way. That Covid-19 is some kind of cosmic test. I believe that God is the creator of the universe. I believe that we live in a fallen creation. I believe that Jesus Christ is the redeemer and that the Holy Spirit is God's power in our lives that sustains and sanctifies us.

I also believe that God uses everything that happens. So this Beta test falls into the category of God using it all for the glory of God. Jesus has been teaching and training the disciples for a while. He knows the crucifixion is coming. He is always seeing how their faith is growing and maturing. As the leader, I believe he is constantly asking: ***Are they ready to launch the Christian church into the world once I Ascend into Heaven?***

And the answer in that boat, during that storm, on the Sea of Galilee their home sweet home was NO!

I believe that Jesus was asleep for two reasons.

1. He knows that one day the disciples are going to have to lead the church without him being in the boat. They will have to face the storms of life without him. Welcome to the life of faith.
2. Jesus knows that he has prepared them. He knows that the raging storms of life will not destroy them, the Christian faith or the Body of Christ the Christian Church. They are ready to live and lead the Christian life. They are ready for discipleship. They are ready to live by faith.

And yet... the disciples fail to live by faith in this situation, during these circumstances.

The disciples are not Disciples of Christ yet.

Frantically, they wake up Jesus. LORD SAVE US OR WE ARE GOING TO DROWN!

Not in the gospel but I think that Jesus is thinking... Did I call you by name to join me on this Messianic mission only to drown in a fishing boat in your back yard the Sea of Galilee?

Jesus wakes up and what he says before he does anything else is rebuke them. "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" I don't think he is yelling... I think he is whispering... disappointed. He calms the sea. The storm ceases. God is the Creator of it all. Jesus uses his power to realign the forces of nature. He calls out to the wind and the rain and the clouds and the sea... Peace, Be Still.

The point of the story is that it is faith in Jesus Christ that helps us rise up to the challenges of the storm in our own backyard – it is Jesus who helps us endure. We have all of the tools we need to remain faithful, kind and peaceful during this pandemic. And it all begins in relying on our faith in Jesus Christ. With Jesus we can face this storm of life. With Jesus we can remain peaceful and calm.

The disciples had witnessed countless miracles by this time as they were following Jesus
But on this day they were amazed at the power and authority of Jesus.

God has given us wisdom to experience the Passover of Covid-19 and flatten the exponential curve of the infection.

- Stay Home and practice social distancing
- Protect the most vulnerable by keeping your distance
- Wash your hands
- Continue to give

While all of this is unlike anything we have experienced before, if we trust God, trust one another and remain faithful to the plan by staying apart. This too will pass.

A Tennessee Pastor wrote: I trust God... and I wear a seat belt. I trust God, and I wear a motorcycle helmet. I trust God, and there are enough life jackets in my boat for everyone on board. I trust God and I use oven mitts with really hot dishes. I trust God, and I lock my house at night. I trust God and I have smoke detectors in my house. I trust God, and I take my prescribed medicines. I trust God, and I follow the best guidelines to share the task of flattening the curve. Acting with caution and wisdom does not indicate a lack of faith in and trust in God.

I learned a lot about living in the land of disruption and uncertainty in 2005.

In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita as far north as Many, life was very different. For my church it was six weeks our church ran a shelter. For the people of South Louisiana it was months, years, many of whom have never been able to return.

This is the thing about uncertainty... things come together and things fall apart. The fear, anxiety and worry are real. But the love of God and the peace that passes understanding is greater than all of that. My job in all of this is to remind you that we are a people of faith, hope, love, grace and peace.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our mission, our ministry is to be faithful and wise.

*Irenaeus wrote these words to Polycarp in a letter (120 AD) you can find this letter in the book *The Early Christians**

“Be more zealous than you are now. Learn to understand the times. Expect him to come who is above time, the timeless one, the invisible one who became visible for our sake, the untouched one, the one beyond suffering who came to suffer for us, who in every way endured for our sake.

Toil together, fight, run, suffer, rest, and rise up together as God’s stewards, companions of his table, and his servants! Please him who is your warlord, him from whom you will also receive your soldier’s pay. Let none of you desert the flag! Let your baptism remain your armor, faith your helmet, love your spear, patience your weapon.”

The storm of Covid-19 will pass. In the meantime, let us continue to be faithful and stay home as much as possible to flatten the curve and let us unite in prayer that it passes quickly.

Blessing for the day: Have a good day. Share the light and love of God in all that you say and do. We part from one another in the grace, peace, love and joy of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I’ll pray with you tomorrow. Bye.