

Pentecost 5, Year B  
June 23, 2024  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, OH  
The Rev. Gabriel Lawrence

Job 38:1-11  
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32  
II Corinthians 6:1-13  
Mark 4:35-41

Well, here we are. In this 178 year old parish, we have arrived at yet another time of transition as we search for our next rector. In fact, this parish has gone through at least fourteen transitions like this one before. We arrive at this time of transition, no doubt, carrying many feelings and emotions. Sadness and grief over the departing 16<sup>th</sup> rector of St. Paul's, and hopefulness as we look toward calling the 17<sup>th</sup> rector of St. Paul's in the next year or two. There's no doubt also probably some fear, or at least concern for our future, which right now might feel unknown. So many questions are and will remain unanswered for a while as we navigate this time and prepare for what is to come. It is normal in a time of transition like this for us to feel all of these things and more. These times of transition require that we sit in this space of having let go of what was and not sure quite yet of what is to come.

And while this time can bring up feelings of unease, we should remember that we liturgical Christians have some practice at waiting, at spending some time in this in between space. Think about it. We spend four weeks during Advent preparing for the birth of Christ at Christmas. We know the birth will happen, but we anticipate the birth of Christ while we hear from the prophets and John the Baptist calling us to repentance. We also spend some time in the in between on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. On Good Friday, we commemorate the death of Jesus. We know that is Easter is coming in a few days, but we sit in the silence of the tomb with Jesus and wait. And then there are those ten days between the Ascension of Jesus into heaven and the day of Pentecost. For those ten days, we feel the absence of Jesus while we wait on the promised gift of the Spirit. And I believe all of this waiting is intentional. I even think about the discernment process for folks who feel a call to ordained ministry. The time of discernment and waiting for these folks is usually years. And I think the Church, in her wisdom, offers us this gift of waiting, of spending time in the in between space for a reason: God's best work is done in this liminal space. For when we wait, we are asked to take an honest look at ourselves and to listen for God in the silence. We listen for God to lead us and call us. Indeed a big part of our work as a parish over the next year or more will be for us to listen to where God is calling us and then for who God is calling to this place.

And lest it feel like I am trying to romanticize waiting or the process of discernment, please know I am not. Waiting can be really, really difficult. In fact, it can sometimes feel like we are in that boat on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and his disciples, the boat being tossed about by a storm. This time of transition after a period of stability and predictability might feel a little uncomfortable for a while. And just like the disciples being afraid of the unknown, of not being able to see the path in front of their boat for torrents of rain and wind, we too can be tempted by fear of the unknown, by the unease of having to wait. We might feel some stress to get every decision right, to make every move perfect. In the interest of doing what is best for this parish that we love so much, we might be led some days by our anxieties. But here is the good news for us today: we are not in control. And while that may not always feel like Good News, take a look at what happened in the boat during the storm.

Jesus calmed the storm. Jesus spoke "peace be still", and the rain and the wind and the thunder and the raging sea obeyed. Jesus took control of the situation and brought safety and calm to the minds and hearts of the disciples. And he will do the same for us in this time of transition. He will lead us through this process. Jesus will quite literally take the wheel. If we can lean into this time of discernment and hand over our fears and anxieties and worries, it can be

a spiritually rich time for this parish. We can discern with a clear mind and heart as a community about where God is calling us, about how God wants to write the next chapter of this place.

It's important here to note that giving up control and handing all of our fears and anxieties over to Jesus does not mean that everything is always going to feel perfect. Notice that during the storm on the sea, Jesus never cured the anxiety of the disciples. Though he calls them to deeper faith, he never chastises. He only asks questions. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Over three years, Jesus greets his disciples many times with the phrase "do not be afraid". But "do not be afraid" is not the same thing as "there's nothing to be afraid of". The point here is that there will be points we are afraid. There might be points we are fearful. Those feelings and those situations are part of what it means to be human. We can't ignore them, and we certainly can't wish them away. But we can trust. We can trust that God is in control and that all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. Jesus's answer to our human fears is peace.

We see God responding to Job in a similar way in our first reading. Before we pick up with Job in today's reading, the chapters that precede today's passage are filled with Job's complaints and questions. "Why was I born?" "Why do you not pardon my sins and take away these trials?", he asks God. "Why does it seem like the wicked get what they want while I perish?" And when God responds to Job's questions, he doesn't scold Job. God knows that Job needed to be reminded of God's own faithfulness and power. And sometimes we need that reminder, too. When we find ourselves in times of transition, of discernment, of waiting, of the "in-between", God shows up and comforts us, too.

And so, as we embark on this transition as a parish where we have so many questions and so much is unknown, I want us to hear God's words spoken to us, the same words God spoke to Job. These words will guide us through the this time.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

"Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb?—

when I made the clouds its garment,

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

and prescribed bounds for it,

and set bars and doors,

and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stopped?'"

Take heart. We journey together. God is with us. And God will be with us. Amen.