

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
July 29, 2018

Text: Genesis 9:8-17

Theme: “Afraid of the Storm?”

Fear is not pleasant. It’s no fun to be afraid. In the presence of sensed danger the body reacts. The heart rate increases, just pounds in your chest. Respiration increases also and your eyes are opened, super sensitized. It is fight or flight. It happens when danger is real and present. Or it happens when something sets off a conditioned response to danger, something that has been etched in your brain—post traumatic stress. The trauma is past but the reaction is present. No fun to be afraid.

There is also the mental aspect of fear. Anxiety, worry weigh heavy on the mind. It also brings physical changes. They are not as sudden and not as dramatic, but can still be quite damaging. And then there is spiritual fear, the fear of heart troubled by God’s law. Oh, what have I done? Look whom I have hurt. Will God, can God forgive me?

Fear can save your life for the moment, alert you to the danger and lead to action. But fear is not your friend long term. It can incapacitate us, cause us to react in harmful ways to self and to others. Are you afraid? It’s time to look up!

Afraid? There was probably plenty of fear to go around for those who just got off the boat. They had been through a world changing ordeal. They were the only survivors, these eight people. They had been on the ark for a year and ten days, afloat on the waters for six months before coming to rest on Mount Ararat. What would that all have been like? The 40 days and 40 nights of deluge was not the half of it. The fountains of the deep had been opened. There must have been great seismic disturbances, splitting of the ground, upheavals of earth and water. Those first 40 days must have been one rough ride,

no pleasure cruise. And then there were all those animals to take care of and the whole time trying to maintain civility with one another.

So they rest on the mountain until the waters recede enough for their exit. Finally it happens. They come off the boat. Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifice (8:20-22). If you are smelling extinction here, relax, there were seven pairs of the clean animals and birds taken on the ark. We read in Genesis 8:21, “And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.”

So off the boat, now what? They are the only living people on earth. Will there be enough food on this battle scarred planet? What if one of those meat eaters has an eye for one (or more) of them? What if they don’t get along, a little repeat of Cain and Abel? And maybe when such thoughts come to mind a few clouds gather and it begins to rain. It’s not a hard rain, hardly more than a sprinkle. We may think, “big deal!” But remember what they have been just through. You may know, may be one of those people, who has been through a tornado. The reaction of such a person is different from that of one who has never been with approaching clouds. Think of the people in Puerto Rico who experienced Irma and Maria last year. Don’t you think they are more than a little anxious when they hear reports of another storm forming? If someone has been through an earthquake and was stuck in the rubble for a couple of days before rescue, he is more than a little jumpy if there is a sudden boom and an unexpected and unexplained shaking. Yes, a cloud in the sky more disturbing than we might think. In verse 14 we read, “When I bring clouds over the earth.” There’s a little more emphasis in the clouding in the Hebrew,

“In my clouding a cloud upon the earth.” Yes, we can understand fear in the cloud observers.

There was plenty of fear for those in the boat in our Gospel lesson. Those apostles in the boat had had a long day. They had embarked in a boat with Jesus much earlier for a getaway day that was not so get away. People caught wind of where they were going and when they disembarked at their destination they arrived not to rest and solitude but to sheep without a shepherd. So Jesus shepherds them. He teaches and then provides a meal for over 5000 mouths. It was a physically exhausting day. The apostle distributed the food and then picked up those 12 baskets of leftovers. They must have pretty spent when they made it back into the boat.

Jesus didn't join them initially in the boat. He dismissed the crowd and went up on the mountain to pray. He comes to the boat later, later when it is well out into the lake. He walks out. Now it's dark. From Matthew (14:25) we know it's the 4th watch of the night (between 3 and 6 am). It has not been smooth sailing. The wind is against them. They have had a day of exhaustion and now there is more exhausting exertion. In this physical state and state of mind here comes this figure out toward them on the swells. What would you think? Would you not be afraid there in the boat?

Are we not often afraid here in the boat? We, brothers and sisters, are in the ark of the church. We have been rescued from the seas of sin, death, and the devil. We are reminded of that boat picture as we sit here in the nave of the building. Are the seas a little rough? Are there some alarms going off? No, it's not all smooth sailing. The sea of the culture is pretty choppy. There is concern about the future of the church in this environment. Is there concern about this little part of the church here in Jonesboro, at Pilgrim and the work of Concordia Christian Academy? We have concern about loved

ones who are not in the boat, those who have joined the increasing number of “nons.” They don’t see the need, not even interested in the church as a useful “plugin’ at least as prior generations had been.

We all know life comes with its rains, winds, and storms. Bills can accumulate and resources diminish. Years advance while health declines. Relationships become a little shaky, could be through unfaithfulness, inattentiveness, or just plain busyness. Relocation, arguments, and death bring their own waves. Are the storm clouds gathering? Are we afraid?

Look up. That’s what God said to Noah and his family, look up to ROY, ROY G BIV. ‘Look up to the rainbow to the red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet—those seven wavelengths of light. God says when you see the cloud, don’t fret, don’t fear, never again will there be another flood like the one you just came through. The sun comes through those clouds and you see that beauty, relax, I see it and I am remembering.’

Those in the boat in Galilee were looking up in fear, but the fear changed at their Master’s voice. No, it was not a ghost. It was the Lord. Are we afraid here in the boat, look up, actually look before you on that east chancel wall. There you see the dove and the butterfly. The dove could remind us of the one Noah sent out that first came back with the olive branch, but when sent out again, did not return as it had found a place to rest and nest. It could, but it is meant for another dove, God the Holy Spirit, born of water and the Spirit. And on the other banner we see the butterfly which reminds us of new creation, transformation. And there is the bow connecting, God’s promise, though you see this one is more IVROY GB. Maybe the artist was confused or maybe she was trying to show how the promise of baptism exceeds that regarding the flood. It is the promise of the One who is able to do far more than what we ask or imagine.

Look up, look up and see a horrible sight. We see the cross there in the middle of things, this one empty. But those who looked up to Golgotha saw a man dying that horrible death full of shame, pain, and ridicule. On that day day turns to night and the ground will tremble. The cry of despair pierces the darkness (Matthew 27:45-46). Look up. It's the LORD. This is the LORD who sent the deluge, the One who set the bow in the sky, the One who can do far more than we can ask or imagine. He's doing what He promised.

It's the promise of facing, taking the deluge of His own justice. He does this for us. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Can you comprehend the breadth and length, and height and depth of such love? This love is for you. The Son is there for you. It should have been you. It should been me, but He's there, the LORD for you, for me, for all. All that horrible sight flowing from the beauty of that love.

There's a wonderful, beautiful change. God uses the water in a new way to assure Noah and his family. Now God has changed the water delivery system. Before the time of the flood a mist came up to water the earth, now the water comes down from the clouds. That initially coming down was part of the deluge. But something different also comes from that same H₂O. Tiny droplets of water act as prisms for that sunlight dividing it into these beautiful wavelengths. God uses His creation to assure the crown of His creatures. It happens at God's word and God's promise.

On the Sea of Galilee as the speaking of Jesus comes comfort. And when He gets into the boat the wind just stops. The disciples are not alone in the boat. Nor are we. Those baptized are born of water and of the Spirit. It's plain old water but it turns out not so plain, not water only, but water included in God's command and combined with God's Word. His word is to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. It is a

washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. We are buried and raised with Jesus in baptism, yes new creations. Christ, the risen and ascended Christ is at God's right had even now interceding for you. God is working all things for your eternal good.

Fear not, despite all those challenges fear is assuaged. It must have been quite the time for those who got off the boat as the pages of Scripture reveal, but from those eight come all of us, all nations of the earth. That small group on the boat on Galilee, those twelve. But from twelve would come all of us. Disciples are indeed made, hundreds of millions.

God is not limited by our fears, a fearful child does not incapacitate a loving parent. God does not desert us in fearful times. Look up to the One raised up. Look up to the One who came down for us. Look up to the one who comes down to us even now in the Word, in the water, and in the bread and wine. For Jesus' sake. Amen