

Sermon 2024 06 23

Good Morning! For those who don't know me, I'm Vince Katter, current Senior Warden of St Mark's, that is: I'm the chair of the church council (which is known in Episcopal speak as the Vestry).

My aim today is to reflect on the Gospel and how it pertains to our circumstances, and I'll take the opportunity to offer a brief update on two major items of our congregational life together — the state of our project to build a new parish hall, and the search for a priest to serve our congregation.

First - a brief update on our building project.

You can see the progress that has been made over the past month or so - we now have brick cladding on most of the exterior walls. The steel for the roof should be arriving next week, and work on the new permanent ramp by the Bride's Walk door will start in July — which means that wheelchair access through the Bride's Walk door will be interrupted for a period of time. Our construction firm is working on temporary wheelchair access for the Main Doors. As the nature of that solution becomes clear, I will share that with you all.

If you are curious about the building plans, we now have 2 color coded posters of the layout of the new building available for your review in the back of the church. The Vestry has recently received costs for buildout options of the interior spaces of our parish hall from our general contractor. We are likely to finish the interior in groupings of rooms, in sequence, rather than all at once. You can expect to see 2 additional bathrooms by fall and the nursery will follow. We will communicate specific costs for the groupings of rooms soon.

Secondly - Regarding the search for our next priest - the Vestry has assembled a parish profile incorporating your thoughtful responses to the survey and the conversations in the cottage meetings. In reading them, I have to say - thank you thank you thank you!! I saw the St. Mark's that I love in your comments. We will be sharing the parish profile with you in the next few days, and we anticipate moving into the next phase of the search process shortly. It may hearten you to know we expect to have a new priest some time this fall!

OK - done with the updates - on to the Gospel.

As I reflected on the Gospel for today from Mark — and with a look at the other readings — I see a theme in these stories that I will call “the experience of Grace”.

To offer one interpretation of “ the experience of Grace” - Grace is when the Kingdom of God breaks into the world. It can be awe-inspiring, it can be comforting, it can be clarifying,

sometimes terrifyingly so. Our job is to watch for Grace, to celebrate it, and to figure out how to extend it. Sometimes we are called to be agents of Grace, as one might expect of agents of the Holy Spirit and as the reading from 2 Corinthians implies - there will be a very wide range of circumstances where our agency can operate.

(3:10)

In today's Gospel, we are given a peculiar picture of the kingdom of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is fast asleep - shockingly so - while pandemonium is in full swing on this boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. (There are great paintings of this scene in classical art, depicting truly mountainous waves.) We consider a moment just before he's woken up by the crew of disciples. In the midst of chaos, Jesus is calm. Sleeping, even!

The disciples have been frantically using bailers to get the water out of the boat, probably cursing in Aramaic that they don't have enough bailers, so they are now using their cupped hands. They are probably trying to stay out of the way of the boom, which is surely madly swinging about in the wind. They think the boat is about to founder! These are men who have spent their lives on the water. One of them probably owns the boat they are on! They are in full panic mode. So what do they do? They wake up the guy that has been talking in parables all day to crowds big enough to fill the beaches on that side of the lake. They are incredulous that he is sleeping!

Jesus wakes. He tells the wind to calm, *it does*, and then he asks them - "Why are you freaking out? How are you still lacking faith?"

Ouch.

I'm not sure how Jesus delivers this line. It's easy to assume that He was a little annoyed — long day, woken up from a nap he clearly needed — but maybe not. Maybe this story offers us insight into a scene where Jesus is truly human AND truly divine. In any case, by the saving, calming nature of His acts, he shows them a miraculous kind of Grace.

The passage relates that the disciples were terrified by the storm, but then *because of the way Jesus solves the problem*, they were even more overwhelmed. That's quite the whiplash - they've been sailing this body of water for years, they have been in a storm where they think they are about to drown, and now they are suddenly, unexpectedly, safe. Safe, but wet. Safe, but slack jawed with wonder, and maybe chastened a bit. Once they stop shaking from the experience, they are in awe of the unexplainable power, demonstrated right in front of them!

What about us? When we experience astounding Grace, are we shaken?

Or are we thankful that we haven't had to weather a raging storm? Maybe we are perturbed that we haven't had something quite as obviously miraculous happen to us? It *would* clarify things, quite a bit.

I've had my share of close calls on water — and on land, and perhaps you've had your share of raging storms, actual or metaphorical. Maybe in the midst of those, you've found grace.

Or perhaps no one showed you grace, no one calmed the storm you encountered. There are hard times that show up, things that we mess up ourselves, and things that others mess up that affect us. Life can be pretty tough, and sometimes we sit with our problems that at the moment have no apparent solutions. That's a hard place to be.

How do we proceed?

We proceed by being open to God's action in our lives in ways we don't understand and can't predict. It is an openness to Hope.

God's Grace allows for the emergence of Hope - especially when Hope is what is needed to re-start the virtuous spiral that leads to faith, to love, and then to action.

Being open to 'Grace' and having faith that 'Grace' is a thing that may come, seems easier to contemplate if you have the idea that Grace is right there (holds hand at edge of peripheral vision), right next to us. Always, a possibility. It shows up to change our existence, and to show us what living in the Kingdom is like, and frequently, to demonstrate how we might assist in making that Kingdom a reality.

While we all have our own individual storms and squalls, collectively we are riding out the choppy seas of a building project and of the unsettling experience of not having a priest. Are these waves mountainous? Are the winds gale force? No, things at St. Mark's are not dire, but we do have challenges that were not either obvious or present just a few years ago, and — depending on your circumstances — these issues may loom larger for you than for others.

This is where the notion that we are all agents of grace, just as we are all recipients of grace, is helpful. We might not have the power to calm raging seas with a word, but we are called on to keep faith, and to act when we can, to extend Grace.

Let us consider how we use our time in the world this week to create the conditions for the acceptance of Grace for ourselves and for all those we encounter.

Amen.