

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

“It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a shot rang out. A door slammed. The maid screamed. Suddenly a pirate ship appeared on the horizon. While millions of people were starving, the king lived in luxury. Meanwhile, on a small farm in Kansas, a boy was growing up.” This is of course from the beginning of the great novel by Snoopy, the beagle in the Peanuts comic strip, a creation of Charles Schulz.

It was a dark and stormy night, it had been evening when the boats had set out but they were still out of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus in one boat with his disciples, other boats with them.

So which boat are you in? Are you in the same boat with Jesus, or are you in one of the other boats that were with him? Could it be that you’re one of those people who aren’t in a boat all but walking around the lake to get to where Jesus will be. Have you left the crowd behind? Or are you part of the crowd?

The fishermen disciples who were with Jesus may not have known that the Sea of Galilee is roughly 600 feet below sea level, but they certainly knew that because of the geography, high hills and mountains, with west winds that come over the peaks and sometimes have a funnel-like effect, around the lake violent storms could occur.

So is getting to the other side of the lake a metaphor for life? If we think of it this way, we might hear/read the story a little differently. Many people want to be part of the crowd, not stand out and not take a stand. They know who Jesus is, they’re attracted to him, his message resonates, but. They might not be ready, or think they’re ready, to be in the same boat with Jesus. At best, they might be in some other boat, moving roughly parallel to Jesus, or maybe at least in his vicinity.

But the sudden violent storms of life sweep down, often quite unexpectedly, the boat begins to fill, to list to one side or the other. In the dark, in the middle of a storm out in the middle of nowhere, traveling with Jesus might not seem to be any better than staying with the crowd. But the storms of life hit the crowds too, even when not in a boat but walking, not traveling with Jesus at all. But to whom do you turn if you’re not traveling with Jesus, if you’re not in the boat with him?

Jesus has borne our grief, he has carried our sorrows, he has felt the death of a friend, and then died himself, experiencing desertion, devastation, alone in the midst of the scorn and the mocking. But by his innocent suffering and death he has defeated sin, death and the power of the devil. Risen from the dead, giving life and Holy Spirit to all who are baptized and believe, he will not let us be overwhelmed.

As baptized believers, living in the communion of the church, we are not alone, we will never be alone. Baptized into his death and resurrection, marked with the cross of

Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are in the boat with Jesus, fed, empowered by the Word and Sacrament, nourished on by the Word. Believers in the One whom even wind and sea obey.

There are those who have gone blissfully ignorant of the storms of life, maybe experiencing a little choppy water now and then, even a downpour, and then there are those who seem to have lurched from crisis to crisis with hardly a respite between. Some folks have well developed coping skills, others, not so much. My wife and I have moved from coast-to-coast, been between jobs at times, short of money upon occasion, but in spite of everything, not experiencing anything like the death of a parent until we were in our early 40s. We have ridden out some of the storms, often unexpected, of life. And what has gotten us through, tough times and glad times, is our faith. Faith that is a gift of God, by God's grace.

Faith. Because faith is necessary. Jesus brings calm, he brings peace, not the absence of strife or conflict, not some golden ticket, but the assurance that we are his, the assurance that he is ours, that he is in the boat with us, and nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

AMEN