

2021.09.05 Sermon 15th Sunday after Pentecost ©Gyllian Davies†

Hearing this Gospel story of Jesus calming the sea always makes me think of that amazing poem by Mary Oliver, Maybe:

Sweet Jesus, talking
his melancholy madness,
stood up in the boat
and the sea lay down,

silky and sorry,
So everybody was saved
that night.
But you know how it is

when something
different crosses
the threshold – the uncles
mutter together,

the women walk away,
the young brother begins
to sharpen his knife...

+ Mary Oliver

The whole experience, Oliver concludes, leaves them miserable and sleepy, forgetting how terrified they were before Jesus calmed the storm. They forget how it was even more terrifying that Jesus could do that, make the stormy sea lie down ‘all silky and sorry’. Who wants to remember that! Yes, Mary Oliver says, Jesus himself was “A thousand times more frightening than the killer sea.”

That which we don’t expect. That which we would never have imagined. It frightens us, doesn’t it? This teacher we hang out with talking to the raging sea and wind and they simply... stop. Impossible, right! Only... it just happened. It’s like us in our time confronted with a pandemic of Covid. Which goes on for 18 months, heading towards two years. And the world comes to a standstill - impossible! Happens in books and movies, not in real life. Only here we are. And now we are coming face-to-face with the climate crisis. Rains that just never come. Temperature extremes out of whack with our temperate climate. And it’s not just here - we see it going on all over the world. Perhaps, somewhere deep inside us, the words of Greta Thunberg echo-

“I want you to act as you would in a crisis.

I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

‘Why aren’t you racing to put out the fire?’ is her big question.

This year the church is using the Season of Creation to look at and ponder on this question. We’re seeking actions grounded in faith to respond to the danger we’re in. Really? we too are in a boat on the killer sea.

Only, what do we do often when we decide we’re in danger? In the Gospel and in the poem when we feel like things are out of control we can respond in very strange ways. We feel vulnerable so we react. Sometimes we react with anger like the protestors disrupting Trudeau’s campaign events or showing up at BC hospitals. Sometimes we react with violence towards others who appear different. We blame

them for what's going wrong. And sometimes we turn the anger inwards and become depressed. We can despair that we have any power to change things for the better.

My friend, Elizabeth, experienced that. She was so overwhelmed by the terrible things happening in the world that she sank deep into depression. She saw so much wrong with the world and so little improvement. She saw apathy and ignorance. Did people even care? She became more and more discouraged, more and more filled with despair. She could hardly drag herself around or find the energy to maintain her daily life. The world had never seemed so bleak to her.

So she prayed like she'd never prayed before. This is what she heard God whisper in her ear: "It only matters what *you* do. Never mind everyone else. Every day what you do matters." So she began. Each day - one small action. She'd sign a petition. She'd write a letter. She'd make a phone call to one of her elected representatives. She began to feel better. She began to feel like she was waking up. Her energy came back. She had enough energy to show up at demonstrations and rallies. Big things. Every day - just one thing. She said her life turned around. When I met her she was a woman of indefatigable energy and good humour. A joy and an inspiration.

And the disciples? We know what happened to them - after the execution of Jesus they were filled with the Holy Spirit and took up his work in spite of their fear. Every day, they acted. And that's the crux of the matter. It's not being afraid that does us in. It's when we believe in the fear, when we let it take away our chance to make a difference. We've all been afraid at some time. It's not wrong to be afraid! It's human to be afraid. No it doesn't feel very good BUT it's a feeling. Feelings pass through and are replaced by other feelings. What remains, what lasts, is what we do in spite of the fear. Do we breathe deep and say "I can do this." ? Do we pray for wisdom and courage? Do we step back and make space for God to be present in that space of fear and painful vulnerability? Do we invite God's transforming power to turn what's happening into something more beautiful and life-affirming than anything we could have asked or imagined?

Because remember this: We may be in the midst of a climate crisis. And it may seem terrifyingly enormous and beyond our control. But we do have agency. We can act. We can do small things on our own - one a day. Like vitamins. Like Elizabeth did. Like the disciples did. We can nourish our spiritual health. AND... we can join together with others and do bigger things. We can begin to heal our planet. We can show up in the world - as Christians. As Anglicans. Wherever you live, here on Salt Spring or other places there are things going on. I found one thing. At noon this coming Wednesday there's a country-wide day of action planned. It's right before the English language election debates. A chance to show the candidates what *The Big Issue* is. This Day of Action is called Canada on Fire. And you know it's happening right here on Salt Spring. So I signed us up. All of us. The whole church. And I know you'll show up. Why? Because we're followers of Jesus and we know it matters. Why? Because it's God's creation that we're defending. And we love God and we love God's Creation. Amen.