

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

Mark 4:35-41

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Year B, Season of Pentecost

Proper 7, Ordinary Time 12

Sunday Between June 19 and June 25 Inclusive

3rd Sunday After Pentecost 2009

Sermon in a Nut Shell

I have to confess that I am guilty too often hearing and “accepting” the grace of God in a way that is interesting, but also in a way that it makes no actual difference in my life. Yes, I may be briefly inspired while at church. But once I walk out the door, it makes no earthly difference. What would it be like in my life / in your life / in our life if I / you / we accepted the grace of God so that it actually made a lasting difference?

Have You Still No Faith

The passage we heard read from Paul’s second letter to the Christians living in the city of Corinth, begins with a beautiful double negative:

(Do) not accept the grace of God in vain

Since I live with an English teacher, I am mindful of the need to practice good grammar. So let’s state what Paul has written in the affirmative. Instead of: “do not accept the grace of God in vain,” stated positively it becomes:

accept the grace of God in ... hmmm, what is the reverse of “in vain”?

(suggestions offered from the congregation) fruitful, with integrity, productive, ...

So really what Paul is saying is:

accept the grace of God so that it actually makes a difference in your lives.

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What would it be like in my life / in your life / in our life if I / you / we accepted the grace of God so that it actually made a lasting difference?

The story that we heard from Mark today is actually an interesting case study of what Paul is talking about.

The disciples who have followed Jesus have caught a glimpse of the grace of God that was present in him, but when the storm comes, we see that it has not yet made a lasting difference in their lives.

When we listen to stories like the one from Mark today, it is important not to get distracted by the special effects. It is important to stay focussed on the story. And today, the story hinges on 4 key questions.

1. Do you not care that we are perishing?
2. Why are you afraid?
3. Have you still no faith?
4. Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?

Jesus and his followers are in a boat. It is night. A great wind storm arises, and the waves threaten to swamp and sink the boat. Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat.

The followers of Jesus are not asleep; they are wide awake and scared to death.

Now for some reason they interpret Jesus being asleep as an indication that he doesn't care. If they had taken a good communications skills workshop, instead of asking, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" They would have woken Jesus and said, "We feel uncared for when we see you sleeping while we are afraid that we are perishing." That's a much better way to own your feelings.

And it raises some interesting questions.

Just why was Jesus asleep in the middle of the storm? What was the difference between Jesus and his followers? Why was Jesus asleep and resting while they were awake and frightened?

(various suggestions from the congregation)

OK, so in a nutshell, we might say that Jesus had accepted the grace of God so that it actually made a difference in his life, and so far, the disciples had not.

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But why does accepting the grace of God so that it makes a difference in your life, mean that Jesus is able to be asleep and the disciples are not? Or let's ask a slightly different question. Is the grace and caring of God any less present during the storm than before it?

(various suggestions from the congregation)

What if the boat had been swamped and they had all perished?

(various suggestions from the congregation)

So the good news that is sometimes hard to hear is that the grace and caring of God are always present no matter whether it is stormy or calm. No matter whether we are sleeping or perishing. I wonder what it would be like to actually live with that truth shaping our response to whatever may happen in our lives?

When Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" he is making a connection between fear and the absence of faith. Or actually, it might be better to use "trust" as a translation of the Greek word translated as "faith" here.

Why are you afraid? Have you still no trust?

Exactly. We still have no trust. We still have not accepted the grace of God so that it makes a difference in our lives. Still have not accepted it so deeply that trusting the grace of God has become the default setting in our souls. Accepted the grace of God so deeply that in face of storms and the possibility of perishing, we trust that God's grace and caring are present, and are indeed trustworthy. And so we are able to respond to the storm, not with fear, but with assurance.

When the story ends with the disciples asking, "Who is this then that even the wind and sea obey him," we see that at the outset they did not know this about Jesus. So why did they go wake him up? Apparently, when the storm first arose they didn't think, "No problem. Let's go wake Jesus and get him to tell it to calm down." So why did they go wake Jesus up?

(various suggestions from the congregation)

Just like Jesus, we will not be able to avoid the storms and injustices, the pain and death which life brings, but like the disciples, perhaps even in our fear, we'll remember to go to Jesus.

And together as a community, we'll help one another to grow in faith – to grow in trust – to go to Jesus when we are afraid of perishing. And gradually – may it be so – we will come to trust with the

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same depth as Jesus, that the grace and caring of God are with us always – even as we perish. And we will speak and act with assurance and trust.

Thanks be to God for the grace which we have seen in Jesus, and for the grace which we soak up from being together in this community. Amen.

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