

**8<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost B, Proper 12**

2 Kings 2:1-15

Psalm 114

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Mark 6:45-52

July 30, 2006

In the name of the Three in the name of the One, Amen.

Is it a bit warm this morning? I'd say so. I'm glad to be here, despite the heat, and I'd like to say in all honesty, that I would trade places with Fr. Lebron and Robin at any moment! The thought of Alaska has never had so much appeal to me!! I do know that it can be hot there, and that the sun never sets, but somehow it just sounds cooler to me. None the less I wish them well and a time of refreshment and renewal.

This week is a direct follow up to last Sunday's lessons. The Gospel event in the boat occurs immediately after the feeding of the 5000. Jesus sent the disciples out in the boat to go on to the other side. There was no knowledge of what was to be encountered on that trip. But they were sent on their way. Jesus would catch up later. He wanted to go off to renew and refresh himself. And so those disciples, probably still mystified as to where all that food had come from. "They did not understand about the loaves." They had no more of a clue as to what had happened than the folks who ate.

Neither did they have a clue when Jesus came walking out on the water towards them. In fact they were pretty terrified in the boat in the storm and then – whoa! That just doesn't happen. But it did. And it does. God comes to us at the most unexpected times. God is with us in the midst of our storms.

We might look upon that boat out there with the disciples in it as a metaphor for the church. The church around the time Mark was written was truly being tossed about in stormy seas. There were persecutions, the fall of Jerusalem, the followers of the way were still eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus and the coming of the Kingdom. It wasn't happening and they were anxious about what it all meant.

Miraculously the little boat, the church, was not swamped. Miraculously the wild winds that held up the boat's progress, despite the best efforts of the disciples, did not prevail. The baby church not only survived, it flourished and grew and spread. Ultimately faith won the day for in spite of the difficulties, the apostles and leaders of the early church held the faith. Because of this faith, Jesus enters their boat and the winds die back.

This metaphor of the church as the boat out on stormy waters applies to us today whether we look at the national Episcopal church which has been experiencing any number of rough and stormy seas lately, or whether we look within ourselves here at Trinity Church Janesville. I'm not really sure of what issues you may have right now, but I know that because there are many people here, that there are bound to be times when you feel like you are in a storm at sea, being tossed around by the waves, and having the wind howling around. It's a part of living in this world and in living together.

Paul offers us the ethical solutions to our problems today, just as he did to the early church. Last Sunday you heard about the big issues dividing the church from within itself – circumcision or no circumcision. This was a big and major storm in the early church threatening to divide it from within. Gentiles were seen as not quite as good. Paul saw his mission to the Gentiles and was proclaiming that were all one in Christ. Last week we heard that Jesus was our peace that he had broken down the walls between the Jew and the Greek, abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances and was creating in himself one new humanity. Reconciling both groups to God in one body putting to death the hostilities between them.

This week we hear how to put these things into practice. For me they are summed up in this condensation of the whole text: "...lead a life worthy of the calling...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace....building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith."

As for the national church we just finished our general convention. Where we have been struggling with this whole issue of unity. The General Convention just passed, has again brought to the fore front the need to lead lives within the church with all humility and gentleness, bearing one another in love to build up the Body of Christ. And those are indeed the virtues needed for maintaining the unity of our Denomination and of our world wide witness and fellowship in the Anglican Communion. Last Thursday I attended a meeting at St. Dunstan's, Madison, I know that several members of this congregation attended a very similar meeting at Christ Church, Delavan to hear, to question, and to reflect on General Convention. I know that there are many in our church who feel that the actions taken went too far and also those who felt that the actions did not go far enough.

Just a few of the actions that did not grab the headlines, but in many respects are far more demanding of our attention included the adopting and continued endorsements of the mission priority of the Millennium Development Goals which call for among other things the eradication

of extreme poverty and hunger, provision of universal education, gender equity world wide, improved health care, environmental stability, and global partnerships (remember Paul's letter also focuses on unity and harmony within the universe, the physical—Paul's world was the entire world as it was known then) There was also work was done on Reparations, racial harmony, liturgical reforms and canonical changes. All of these you will hopefully here more about.

Of course the major issues seemed to revolve around our church's official response to the Windsor Report (a report issued by the Lambeth Commission in 2003) and the election of Katharine Jefferts Shori as our new Presiding Bishop, the first woman primate in the history of the Anglican Communion. There were and still are those who are afraid, who question and who protest these actions. Is this any different than the fear of those disciples out there in that boat being tossed about on stormy seas Remember what was it that Jesus said to those in the boat? "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid". Then what happened, Jesus got in the boat and the wind ceased and they were utterly astounded FOR they did not understand about the loaves, their hearts were hardened."

However, the sense that I got from the meeting at St. Dunstan's was a sense of hope and a sense of expectation. To quote one delegate: "I was simply stunned by the way that people of diverse backgrounds and views and opinions...were prayerfully supportive of each other." Yes, there have been dioceses that have petitioned to be removed from the oversight of the Katherine Jefferts-Shori. But they are in the minority. I like the Bishop's statement that in the end "our salvation does not depend upon our rightness, but on our righteousness—God's gift to us by grace." If we pay attention to the instructions in Ephesians and we open our selves to the faith we have then Jesus enter our boat, calm our seas and we will continue to reach out in love to all "with gentleness, humility and patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

In looking at the Windsor Report more aptly called the Windsor Process, we see the place for these virtues. The process is only beginning, and calling it a process allows for the spirit to move, for growth to occur, and for the building up of the body of Christ. After all we are only in the first parts of this conversation, this sharing of gifts, this opening of our hearts, ALL of our hearts to the Spirit and what the spirit is saying. As David Pfaff, one of the delegates said, you can read this in Episcopal Life, please do: "The decisions...reflect a sincere effort...to discern God's will for the church, and to hold in tension...many points of view...It was not about

winner and loser, right or wrong; it was about expressing a sense of humility in our relations with others that keeps the possibilities open.”

So, is this not what Paul teaches us in Ephesians? Unity, Christian unity, not to be confused with uniformity! All members of the Body have various gifts which lead to diversity in the unity of One body. Has not this always been the hall mark of our church—we are a church where you do not have to park your brain at the door. We do not have to give up our gifts, our ideas our diversity our various ministries in order to share in the Body and Blood of Christ. What we do need to do is to worship together and to work together -- to listen to one another, to love one another, regardless of opinion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or even whether or not you're a star-bellied or a plain bellied Sneetch (Dr. Seuss was a very wise man) for it is in and through these differences that growth comes.

We know in order for growth to occur there must be an openness and willingness to change – not just for the sake of change for that would be “being tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, or craftiness in deceitful scheming” – kind of like those disciples in the boat that were being tossed about and were afraid. We know that there will be and must be some pains and some fears but remember that Jesus came to those disciples in the boat and comes to us as well, saying “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid”. No this change which we must be open to is change for the sake of building up the body of Christ, the church, in love. In short, what we need to do is to open our hearts and our minds to the presence and love of Christ in each and every person. Thus we might also then understand the miracle of the loaves, the feeding of the multitudes of the bread of life.

Just after she was selected as the Presiding Bishop-elect Bishop Shori wrote to her diocese: “I am deeply honored and humbled to have been called to serve the church in this way, and I look forward to a glorious season of mission that will demand our best efforts and call forth all the gifts of this church – known and as yet unknown. May that focus on mission be for us and the world a royal road to reconciliation. As we seek to realize the Millennium Development Goals, may the world in our day again be able to say not only see those Christians, how they love one another” but “how well they love those beyond their bounds.” May we come to see and celebrate the in-breaking of the Reign of God in our neighbor’s lives as well as in our own.”

Amen