*Holy Parent, disturb our hearts, Holy Sibling, break open our lives, Holy Spirit lead us to wholeness. Amen.*

In the Gospel story today Jesus and his disciples set off from a long day of teaching the crowds in Galilee for a different shore. Jesus is sending them to “the other side”, to Gentile territory. Mark tells us the disciples take Jesus, *just as he is*…those are the words Mark uses…*just as he is*…. exhausted and drained from a long day…….really many long days of being surrounded by throngs of people, men, women, children, families; all needing healing, hoping for a miracle. Jesus, just as he is, very human in his need for rest, lies down and falls asleep.

Well, we know what happens. A great windstorm arises and beats down upon the boat. Waves crash and the boat takes on water. The disciples are terrified, panicked, despite the fact that Jesus is with them. Before we become too critical of the disciples, let’s not forget, some of these men were fishermen. Now, despite the fact that Bob and I have been cruise aficionados for several years now, (we just came back from Alaska) I am no authority on sailing or of storms at sea, and so I am going to trust the disciple’s instincts on this. They knew the predicament they were in. Their fear was not unfounded. This was no common storm.

From a literary sense, a storm at sea is one of the most effective ways of expressing chaos. There is nothing stable to grasp onto when we are engulfed in wind and waves. The most solid thing near us may indeed be a large outcropping of rock that would destroy the very vessel that carries us. People really do die in storms.

The panicking disciples wake Jesus – “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?” And with a few words, Jesus calms the storm– “Peace. Be Still.”

 *And the wind ceased ……….. and there was a dead calm*.

So, typically what would follow in a sermon on this passage would be some thoughts on faith and fear, and that is certainly something for us to consider, but today I would like to point to something else in the scripture. In our psalm reading today, the occupants of ships, overcome by wind and waves, their hearts melting because of their peril and at their wits end, cry out for deliverance and are rescued from certain death by the Lord their God. Their response is one of gladness and exaltation and praise.

But in Mark’s gospel, in a remarkably similar situation of danger and imminent destruction on the sea, the disciples cry out,

Jesus calms the storm,

but we hear no words of relief and praise.

In response there is a question, whispered amongst themselves, coming out of great awe (often translated as great fear) for this miracle they have experienced; *“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

That is quite the question, my dear friends; Who indeed is this? One commentary I read this week translated the Greek as *“who the heck is this?”*, which may have more accurately expressed the disciple’s emotional condition. It’s interesting that at this point, even though the disciples have been following Jesus around, witnessing the healings and listening to his teaching, they still have not come to any conclusions, or perhaps have not even really considered the source of his authority until now. It took a storm at sea, a destabilizing under the most extreme of circumstances, to shake them to their very core.

It is not the miracle, this calming of the storm all around and about them that changes them, it is the question………**Who is this man?** What is the truth of Jesus, the truth of this deep mystery that causes such divine discomfort? As far as the disciples knew this is just a humble man who tells stories about mustard seeds and birds and trees that no one truly understands, and who talks about a kin-dom of God that seems much less king-dom-like than their expectations. This Jesus, *just as he was*, suddenly shows himself to speak with the full authority of the God who created and commands the water and the wind.

When that dead calm, as Mark describes it, took over, I imagine that everything stopped, kind of like a freeze-frame on a cinematic screen. Everything smoothed, the boat sat still, all noise ceased, even the people in the boat were caught between breaths. Perfect stillness….

I can remember going fishing with my dad when I was a girl. We would go to this mountain lake in my dad’s canoe and just sit there, lines in the water, sitting very still. The lake would be like glass and everything, trees, sky, clouds, and the boat wuld be reflected in the water. Just lean over and I could see my face just as if I was looking in a mirror.

The disciples took Jesus out with them “just as he was”. Their challenge was to look at this simple and humble man and see God. So, here is the question that may have been the real source of the disciples spiritual sea-sickness. If the disciples (and, by disciples, I mean us); if WE, are in this boat with Jesus, the next question we should be asking is, “then, who the heck are we?” For it is our reflection that we see in the dead calm of the water, sitting there right next to him. It is the reflection of the Holy that we see in his eyes reflected back at us.

**So if we claim our seat in the boat with Christ, then just who does that make us? If we say we are his followers, just what are we following? If we are the people of his Gospel, then what do those words mean in our lives?**

In the Gospels, Jesus speaks in parables about the nature of the Kingdom. The kingdom of God is like….

Karoline Lewis, in her essay, Crossing the Kingdom, writes this, “*Jesus knows. It’s one thing to talk about the Kingdom of God. It’s another thing to experience it. It’s one thing to expound on theories about the Kingdom of God. It’s another thing to act on those claims.. It’s one thing to imagine what the kingdom of God might be like. It’s another to insist on what the Kingdom of God is and needs to be.”*

Even as the storms and the blustering voices rage against our small vessel, against God’s will, God’s love and God’s vision for the world, Jesus is in the boat with us now, in the midst of the waves and the wind. From him, from his Gospel, we draw the strength to seek our true identity as children of the One God, and to do so in spite of, and because of, our awe at the fearsome power of God the Son.

If we believe Jesus can take the chaos of our lives and bring to them calm and order, then we must also acknowledge that he can take what is settled and comfortable and make it chaotic. Transformation is impossible without some divine disturbance. The Spirit is wild, powerful and unpredictable.

Oscar Romero, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador, who was assassinated in 1980 for speaking out against evil forces in that country, preached this about the power of the Gospel and the responsibility of the Church to that message. *“That is what the church wants: to disturb people’s consciences and to provoke a crisis in their lives. A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed – what kind of gospel is that?”*

The United Church of Christ had a campaign in the past few years untitled *God is Still Speaking*, which encourages people to listen for the ways that God speaks to us in scripture and in our hearts about how we are to live together in God’s world. In these days we may find that the message and imperative the Gospel speaks to us brings less comfort than it used to. In these times we may find ourselves a bit spiritually sea-sick and divinely disturbed, rocking in a tiny boat in roiling seas. I pray we may find the reflection of Christ in each other’s eyes, the embrace of Christ in each other’s arms, and see the face of Christ in those men, women and children that reach to us from the “other side”.

Amen.