

10th Weekend after Pentecost

Pr. Nicole Hanson-Lynn

1 Kings 19:9-18

Psalm 85:8-13

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

Grace to you and peace from God our father, our lord and savior Jesus Christ, and the giver and sustainer of our faith, the Holy Spirit.

Water is humbling. I love water; swimming, canoeing, kayaking, tubing... But no matter how many hours I spend in the water, it still is humbling to look down when I can't touch the ground and see, or not see, nothing but water beneath me. And there are rules you have to follow in order to spend time in or on the water. A body of water is strict: you lie down, spreading out your body to float. You swim with the water. You stay in a boat that is designed to stay above the waves. You do not stand on top of it.

And that's precisely what Peter, a man who has spent his life obeying that contract with the water, does in today's reading. This is not the first time that Peter and the other disciples have been in a boat in a storm, but this time, Jesus stayed behind to pray and grieve. This time, the storm doesn't seem as bad; these disciples are not terrified of the storm at the beginning of our reading, but they become afraid when they see Jesus walking on top of the water. It is Peter who responds to Jesus, and his response is so beautiful. On the surface, it looks like Peter is asking for a miracle, and he is, but the miracle for Peter is not the ability to break the rules of water and join Jesus in walking on top of the waves, but proximity to Jesus. "Command me to come to you on the water," where you are. Proximity to Jesus is important to Peter in all four of the gospels. In the gospel of John, after Jesus' resurrection, when the disciples are out on the boat again, another disciple thinks he sees Jesus; and after just that, Peter is the one who jumps out of the boat and swims to shore to be close to Jesus again. And even though Peter's denial is coming after Jesus' arrest, Peter is the one who sneaks into the courtyard to be as physically close to Jesus as he can. So I think, in this reading, rather than seeing Peter looking for more proof that Jesus is who he says he is, Peter is looking for affirmation that Jesus will be in relationship with him. Let me come to you where you are. It's an amazing display of discipleship, trust, and the love Peter has for Jesus.

Which makes it all the more heartbreaking when Peter takes his eyes off Jesus in just a few moments, when he is in the midst of such a new situation, sees the waves crashing around him and is blinded to Jesus right in front of him.

The 1 Kings reading shows Elijah in a similar position. He has just had his showdown with the priests of Baal; God has used him to demonstrate God's power and authority definitively. Elijah's trust and discipleship has grown over these past two and a half chapters from a man claiming God's authority to a prophet speaking and acting in accordance with God's message. Changes are afoot in Israel.

And then Elijah sees Jezebel. And he sees her orders to kill him. And he is blinded to what all God is up to in the face of Jezebel's power and wrath. Elijah's complaint in verse 10 in Hebrew is especially telling. He says, "And I, I alone, I only am left, and they are seeking my life to take it." His focus on himself and his fear has blinded him to the work God was up to in other people. As God reminds Elijah, there is still Hazael and Jehu and Elisha who will follow Elijah, plus seven thousand more.

The Romans passage today talks about belief: confessing with the mouth and believing with the heart. But as I've said before, the Greek word for "believe," *pisteuo* is less about agreeing with a set of ideas than it is about trusting in a person. Hebrew doesn't even have a noun form of the word: it is always a verb of "to trust." So what does it take for our hearts to trust God when we find ourselves confronted by a force that is contrary to God's will? When following Jesus leads us into places we've never been before, where the usual rules don't apply? When we're someplace new, when we see the wind and the waves and look down and there is only chaotic water beneath us?

Jesus calls Peter, "you of little faith." And that sounds like an insult, doesn't it? Like Jesus is rebuking Peter for having so little faith. But we've just spent two chapters hearing parables and stories about a little being enough. Faith the size of a mustard seed. An offering of lunch leftovers. A seed that yields hundredfold. Peter's little faith is enough. When he begins to sink, he does trust enough to cry to Jesus for rescue, and Jesus does catch him, immediately. We know that despite Peter's denials, he does become a rock for the church; he does lead the new church, sometimes with more wisdom than others; he does eventually follow Jesus to death. His little faith is enough.

Sisters and brothers, I proclaim to you as well, that we are called to lives of faithful trusting in God. And I confess to you that we will all fall short. We will all fail to listen to God's voice when we are afraid and uncomfortable and just longing for life as we knew it. We would be hypocritical to denounce Peter for his little faith and for his doubt today. We would be hypocritical to write off Elijah for his fear that blinds him to God's actions. And still we are invited to trust in the promise. The promise that Christ is with us always, in the midst of the storm and in the midst of the silence, even to the end of the age. To trust again and again and again.

Announcements

Thank you to everyone continuing their financial support. Your stewardship and discipleship are faithful witnesses in this time.

We still are offering Bible studies with video conferencing **and phone options**. If you are interested in joining, please call either Salem (906) 932-1510 or Zion (906) 932-1320.

We are excited to offer our Wednesday services sharing testimonies from the congregation. Today, you will find Jim Mildren's testimony from July 22 included. If you are interested in sharing a testimony, please call either office. Peace be with you!

Wednesday, August 5 Testimony from Ellen Metko

Good Evening! My name is Ellen Metko and I will be sharing some of my history and faith journey with you tonight.

My Moravian ancestor came to America from Prussia as the first Protestant missionary to the Delaware Indians in 1756. He started a long lineage of clergy that has spanned seven generations. My grandfather, uncle and several cousins are Lutheran pastors. At most major family events there were usually several clergy taking part. My 88 year old uncle still preaches and travels for the Food For The Poor organization. Had they been ordaining women when I was ready for college, I may have gone into the ministry as well.

One of my earliest memories of my faith journey was of watching my brother being baptized by my grandfather. It was a family celebration in the chapel at St Paul in Neenah and I was 4 1/2 years old. I remember being intrigued by the water in the baptismal font. I am not sure exactly what I did but I was removed from the ceremony by my Dad. The story that I heard years later was that I was being disruptive, but after that incident, I was very well behaved in church!

We lived on a dairy farm near Omro, WI until I was 13. At that time, no worship times at our local parish accommodated my Dad's milking schedule so we listened to the service on the radio in the barn as we milked and fed our cows. Sunday School was scheduled later in the morning so Dad always got us there. I think that the radio experience is what makes me feel very comfortable with listening our worship services live-streamed now— over sixty years later.

Catechism classes started in 6th grade to prepare for confirmation and first communion in 8th grade. I remember feeling especially drawn to learning the meanings of the petitions to the Lord's Prayer and to incorporating the asking, praising and thanksgiving into my own prayers. The Pastor was a great teacher and I was an enthusiastic and diligent student.

In Spring of my 7th grade year, my parents sold our farm and we were to move to Shawano, WI. I was devastated by this news for many reasons but, for this narrative, my disappointment was that I wouldn't be able to be confirmed with my class in 8th grade. I decided to ask the Pastor if he would consider confirming me a year early since we were moving. My parents were not involved in this decision of mine. The very next Sunday as I walked with Pastor Boyer from the Sunday School building to the church, I finally got up the courage to ask. He responded that he would be proud to confirm me and that I was definitely spiritually ready. I was on cloud nine! I can still feel the warmth of the sun shining down on me that March morning! Examination, Confirmation and First Communion took place over three Sundays in May.

I was a member of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church until we moved to Menasha in 1965. There we joined a LCA (Lutheran Church in America) congregation which later became the ELCA which we are now.

My faith journey continued with joining Luther League, teaching Sunday School when I was in high school and participating in campus ministry in college. Being an active participant in worship and congregational activities has always been an important part of my life. I met my husband Greg at our church. It was imperative for me to share my life with a partner that also shared my faith.

Years of lay reading have left me with many meaningful texts. However, the one that resonates with me repeatedly is " The Time For Every Thing" from Ecclesiastes 3. I was excited to hear some words from the

Bible in the song by the Byrds " Turn Turn Turn" when it was popular in the 60's. I read this passage from Ecclesiastes at the Celebrations of Life for my parents and for Greg's parents.

As we pass through different seasons of life, sometimes we are faced with unexpected change. It's natural to wonder why God allows certain events to happen. In this portion of Ecclesiastes, Solomon let's us know that we never will fully understand why such things occur. As I read the passage, try to think of a situation in which these "times" have been or will be true in your life.

Understanding every part of life and how it fits together can be perplexing. Each piece contributes to the beauty of the picture but we don't know how. God makes everything beautiful " in its time". That's a promise of optimism! Everything will eventually fit together to form a beautiful picture!

Now the reading from Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15

Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses.

He sets the time for birth and the time for death,
the time for planting and the time for pulling up,
the time for killing and the time for healing,
the time for tearing down and the time for building.
He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy,
the time for mourning and the time for dancing,
the time for making love and the time for not making love,
the time for kissing and the time for not kissing.
He sets the time for finding and the time for losing,
the time for saving and the time for throwing away,
the time for tearing and the time for mending,
the time for silence and the time for talk.
He sets the time for love and the time for hate,
the time for war and the time for peace.

What do we gain from all our work? I know the heavy burdens that God has laid on us. He has set the right time for everything. He has given us a desire to know the future, but never gives us the satisfaction of fully understanding what he does. So I realized that all we can do is be happy and do the best we can while we are still alive. All of us should eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for. It is God's gift.

I know that everything God does will last forever. You can't add anything to it or take anything away from it. And one thing God does is to make us stand in awe of him. Whatever happens or can happen has already happened before. God makes the same thing happen again and again.