
After college graduation, my family vacationed to Lake Powell in southern Utah. Lake Powell was formed when the Colorado River was dammed by the Glen Canyon Dam, flooding Glen Canyon.

We rented a boat and enjoyed exploring the many little coves and canyons with multi-stratified rock rising out of the water, which is beautiful. One day, as we were heading back to shore across a very wide part of the lake, a storm came up, out of nowhere. The whitecaps got bigger, the wind began to blow harder and harder, the boat was tossed about, and we were still a long way from shore.

Maybe you’ve been there, out on a boat, in a storm, waves, wind, feeling precarious knowing that your boat could capsize, and you are at risk of being dumped into the water.

Fortunately, with some careful driving into the bigger waves so that they wouldn’t swamp the boat, we made it back to shore. But the memory of our family’s vulnerability in a boat in the storm lives on.

More than likely, the disciples had been in storms on the Sea of Galilee. They were fishermen, after all. But as far as we know, they had not been on their boat, in a storm, with their Rabbi Jesus snoozing in the back of the boat. And at night to boot, even more treacherous and frightening.

It is remarkable that Jesus is asleep in the storm. We have a pretty good idea of what the boat is like because archeologists have discovered what has been dubbed “The Jesus Boat,” a boat that dates from the time of Jesus in the 1st century.

It’s basically like a big canoe, 27 feet long, 7 feet wide, 4 feet high. He’s not asleep on a bed down in the hull of a yacht! He’s propped up on the back of a big canoe.

And the disciples, are understandably afraid,
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

This is an interesting question. Notice they don’t ask

“Why don’t you do something?” or

“Why don’t you save us?!”

No, they simply ask, “Don’t you care?”

At the simplest level, they are wondering why he’s ignoring their plight.

Most likely, they have no idea of what is about to happen. . .

This would explain why they are freaked out when Jesus has a few words with the storm, and the wind and waves calm.

Interestingly, the Greek word for “great” is used three times in this story. I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know, because the Greek for great here is *megas*, or “mega.”

It was a Mega Storm, (v.37)

There was a Mega Calm, (v. 39)

And the disciples had a Mega fear (v. 41) after Jesus calmed the wind and the waves. The translations that say the disciples had “great awe” makes it sound like it’s a sunset or fall colors on the the North Shore. . .

No, this is a power they could not have even imagined.

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

In addition to the storm, and then seeing the awesome power of Jesus over nature, there was another reason the disciples may have been anxious.

Crossing the Sea of Galilee represents more than just crossing a lake, like crossing from one side of Lake Phalen to the other.

Crossing from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other is to cross from the Eastern/Jewish Side to the Western/Gentile/Side.

The lake crossing, the storm, and the wind-battered boat are all part of the journey to to a new and unknown destination. Leaving the familiar, going to the unfamiliar. Leaving the comfortable old, for the unfamiliar new. ***Unknown territory. Foreign Land.***

Sound familiar? See any connections to us here at AHL. . . ?

As you know, the boat, or the ship, has a long history of representing the Church. So if we reflect for a minute on the boat that is AHLC, is it not the case that we are in some choppy waters? After almost 115 years, we have unanimously agreed to sell our building. This is a huge step, and to be commended.

Our new owners are familiar with and supportive of the work we have done and the work we intend to do. We have said that we are supportive of the transition of the mission and ministry we are no longer able to do to our new owners, who are in a position to continue the mission and ministry on the East Side.

Without question, there are details that we will need to work out. It might feel like rough waters, maybe even like a storm. And maybe we might feel like God is not listening, or God is not aware of our situation, or that Jesus is asleep on the boat.

Such was the case in our OT reading this morning in Job. As you know, Job suffered unthinkable loss: In short order, Job lost

all of his property,
his 12 children died,
And sores appeared on his whole body.
His friends, there to comfort him,
ended up accusing him of sinning against God.
His wife encouraged him to “Curse God and die.”

But Job endured the unthinkable suffering, and the insufferable “friends” who kept telling him he must have done something wrong to have this much calamity visited upon him.

Job held his ground, saying he’d no sinned, and that he was faithful to God.

But eventually, Job, in a series of speeches, essentially says,
“Woe is me.”

“What happened to the good old days?”

“I did right by you God, why aren’t you doing right by me now?”

Why did bad things happen to good, upright, righteous Job?

In the past few months, I’ve been taking steps to transfer my ordination from the Reformed Church in America to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America. I've filled out lots of paperwork, taken five personality inventories, met for three hours with a psychologist, had an interview with the Candidacy Committee, and this past week, met with the Theological Review Panel to see if my theology is Lutheran enough. Happily, I've passed all tests so far, with a 10-page paper and a last interview with the Final Approval Committee remaining.

As I prepared for my exam, I was reminded again about one of the things that I really like about Lutheran theology: its affirmation of *paradox*.

Paradox, as you know, is two ideas or propositions that are at the same time, true, yet appear to be contradictory or untrue.

The Christian is both saint and sinner (*Simul justus et peccator*)

Christian is free Lord of all, subject to none; The Christian is servant of all, subject to all.¹

God is transcendent – above and beyond and unknowable, and God is imminent – close, knowable, and understandable. And. . .

in some ways, the hardest paradox of our faith to wrap our minds around. God is “all-loving” and “all-powerful” . . . No one would argue with either premise. Who would say, “I don't think God is that powerful” or “God's just not that loving”? So, if God loves us, and has the power to do something about our plight, doesn't God just

Take away the cancer?

Help my family reconcile?

Keep the innocent from suffering?

Theologians have a word for this: “Theodicy.” In the words of Rabbi Harold Kushner's book from quite a few years back, *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* The entire book of Job wrestles with this age-old question. . . Is God a God that just lets us alone?

And THAT is Job's question: “Why me?” Why am I suffering? Won't you do anything, oh Lord? I'm a good person; *I don't deserve this*.

And then transcendent God answers . . .

out of a whirlwind, saying,

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?’

¹Also, “*God is Perfectly Just and Perfectly Merciful*”

Tell me, if you have understanding.. .

God's speech goes on like this for several chapters, and then Job responds, and puts his hand on his mouth, and says, "Oh, I get it, I'll shut up."

'See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?

I lay my hand on my mouth. . .

Do you remember the movie, "Forrest Gump"?

In one of my favorite scenes, Lieutenant Dan, who lost his legs in Vietnam, shows up to be first mate on Forrest Gump's shrimp boat.

He lashes himself to the top of the main mast and yells directions as they go looking for shrimp, but they keep pulling in empty nets.

Lieutenant Dan chides Forrest that he should pray for shrimp. Forrest prays; still no shrimp. In disdain, with an empty net on deck, the Lieutenant says:

Where the h— is this God of yours?

And Forrest narrates:

It's funny that Lieutenant Dan said that, because right then God showed up.

A terrible storm blows in. Wind whips, waves swamp, lightning splinters, thunder shudders, rain comes down in sheets, and their tiny boat is tossed around like a toy.

Forrest says:

Me, I was scared, but Lieutenant Dan, he was mad.

From his perch high above the boat, riding it like a bucking bronco, bare-chested Lieutenant Dan laughs and rages into the teeth of the tempest:

Come on! You call this a storm!

Blow! Blow you SOB!

It's time for a showdown, you and me!

I'm right here! Come and get me!

You'll never sink this boat!

While Forrest and the disciples tremble in fear, Lieutenant Dan asks the question, and even taunts God. Where are you, God?

* * *

As we deal with life, we ask the same question, don't we?:

Where is this God of ours?

In the struggles of life?

Where is this God of ours?

In the transitions of our church building. . . ?

Where is this God of ours?

God, my friends, is in the boat with us.

In the struggles of life, God in Christ is in the boat with us.

In the transition of our church building,

Jesus is in the boat with us.

God is here.

Don't be afraid.

Thanks be to God, **Amen.**