

Gospel reading: Matthew 14:22–33.

Prayer:

Assumptions underlying this sermon: God's sovereignty, the notion of power as it lies in God's divine control or 'taking charge', the notion of God's 'kingdom' redefined around Jesus.

Why does Jesus keep reminding his disciples not to be afraid? Or better question, what does Jesus see in them, us, that he keeps reminds us not to be afraid?

In today's alternate Old Testament reading in I Kings 19, God's prophet has run away and is hiding in a cave. Elijah believes that he is the only prophet left in Israel and those who killed all his 'friends' are looking to kill him too. God asks Elijah what he is doing hiding and tells him to go up to a mountain and listen for His voice. God's voice is not in a thunder storm with extreme winds, nor in an earthquake nor fire, but Elijah heard God's voice in the absolute silence following all these events. God again asked Elijah what he was doing there. God gave Elijah instructions to go back to work and told him, by the way, there are 7000 prophets left in Israel. This seems to mean 'do not be afraid, you are not alone'.

When Jewish parents were telling the story of their history, they perhaps used the story of Joseph (as found in Genesis reading for today) to remind their children and themselves that God is always present even in the midst of trials and bad things happening – you are not alone. The writer of Psalm 105 today reminds us of the same thing. And Paul in our Romans 10 reading says that our faith says that "the Word is near you, on your lips and in your hearts...[because we have confessed] with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your hearts that God raised him [Jesus] from the dead [and, therefore,] you are saved." This instead of trying to figure out why things happen or who sinned or God is trying to punish the world or a particular country. Paul goes on to say that we are to preach the Good News, the Kingdom is at hand. And we are not alone when we step out to do this.

But wait. Look around. There is a world wide pandemic. The world is essentially

locked down due to the Covid-19 virus where millions have been, and are still being, infected and hundreds of thousands have died and are still dying although several million have recovered. And we hear there is likely to be a second wave of the virus. On the other hand, many scientists are working long hours to develop a vaccine.

And on a June evening in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a black man, named George Floyd, was killed by police while investigating George for a non-violent crime. One of 4 policemen had his knee on George's neck for 8 Min 46 seconds during which George several times told the police that he could not breathe. George died. The policemen were fired. There have been many ongoing incidents like this around the world, let alone as has happened in the USA and Canada.

In the same month of June, several First Nations men and women were beaten up or shot by RCMP officers: Chief Allan Adam and his wife were beaten and roughed up in Fort McMurray Alta, Rodney Levi and Chantal Moore were killed by RCMP in separate incidents in New Brunswick, and another First Nations man was beaten up in another of our northern communities. There was also a video that shows police in Calgary beating a black man.

Are these isolated incidents or evidence of systemic racism (see Romans 10:10-13), misuse of power, inequality and injustice? I believe the latter.

A quick look at history shows us that there have been 10 pandemics in the last 2000 years; and racism, misuse of power, gender inequality, you are not as valuable as I/we are, jealousy, envy, pride, slavery, etc. all of which have been around and quite rampant (or systemic) since the days of God's creation in which He chose to give men and women free will to make their choices. In other words, sin – a falling short of the mark God has given us – and not recognizing what God has done in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. Only in the 'world'?

From Church History, witness: Cain and Able, Esau and Jacob, King Saul jealous of David, David lusting after Bathsheba and putting her husband Uriah in the front lines of war certain to be killed, Roman Emperors killing Christians because they did not

worship the God Caesar, Saul (later Paul) sought to kill Christians before his conversation to Jesus, the crusades against the Muslims in the 11th and 12th centuries, feudal system, King Henry VIII during the reformation period divorcing or having his wives killed or put away because he wanted a son as heir (in a fight with the Roman Catholic Pope, the Spanish Inquisition (trials to get people to deny their Protestantism and other heresies), Protestant versus Roman Catholic 'wars' in several countries, killing of Jews 'because they killed Jesus', etc., etc.

Why hasn't or doesn't God stop all of this violence and equality? He did, in His covenant with Abraham and, finally, in Jesus, particularly his death on the cross and his resurrection which ushered into our earthly existence the Kingdom of Heaven. However, the way in which this happening is different than we would like it to be accomplished. We would like it stop right now. But God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has begun the work of healing the earth and bringing the two kingdoms together in a different way than we expected but which we await patiently to be concluded and completed in the future. Is there evidence of this?

We see all this history and we see what God has done in Jesus. Yet, we are still afraid. But God has a different way. We believe that God in His son Jesus and His Spirit is ever present to each of His followers and to His body, the church, in the midst of my/our frustration, our pain, our sorrow, and, of course, our joys as we live in this current life the way things are. He gives strength to pray, to stand firm in my/our faith, to do what we can. If we look we will see what people together have been doing in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown and in the midst of horrendous racism and inequalities of all sorts to all sorts of people, particularly in North America to the black people and people of colour, (e.g., "Black Lives Matter"). It appears that the human race seems to be waking up. Although, this is a time to persevere in the midst of turmoil and backlash and knee jerk reactions towards these bad things, there appears to be real change coming. And it is our task to preach the love and equality that Jesus taught us and to preach that the Kingdom is at hand and is here. N.T. Wright, British theologian in his newest book published in April 2020, "God and the Pandemic", referring to the Passover of the Jews and how Jesus did his ministry (through his disciples), says "They [we] are not looking

backward to what Has caused the problem. They [we] are looking forward to see what needs to be done.” The early church behaved the same way, not looking at the situation they were in theologically but with action behaviour. And we are asked to work the same way, in the belief that God is working to bring His Heaven and earth kingdom to completion through his loyal people.

Witness. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus sent the crowds away and his disciples he sent across Lake Galilee while he spent some time alone in prayer. The boat was getting swamped by heavy seas and wind. The disciples were very afraid of being capsized and they would drown. They were even more afraid when, in the morning, they saw Jesus walking on the water. They thought he was ghost but Jesus said what he has been saying to them all along, “Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter took courage [which we do every time we worship or step out in faith] and asked Jesus to call him which Jesus did. Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water. However, Peter looked around (the storm was still present and with lots of wind making lots of waves) and down. He became afraid again and started to sink until Jesus put out His hand. Peter took His hand and Jesus said” You of little faith...why did you doubt” Jesus and Peter got back into the boat. “Then the storm and winds died down. Those that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” (Matthew 14:22–32 NIV)

As we often do when stepping out in faith, we look around and see how much there is still to do and we may doubt that we are enough and feel alone. We forget that Jesus, as he promised, is with us. So, rely on Jesus in the midst of this our world, persevere, be faithful, be patient as we continue in this not normal space in which we find ourselves. And as we determine how we ourselves can address our own biases toward people who are different than we are and act differently in presence of Jesus.