

Once upon a time, in a far-away land, there lived some dreamers who nightly saw visions of a Promised Land where the sun shined warm, rains came in their season, and a refreshing breeze was always blowing. In the dreamers' Promised Land green forests listened to choirs of singing birds and the pews were filled with people of all ages.

When the dreamers awoke, they agreed to join together in a voyage to the Promised Land of their dreams. So, they built themselves a ship come shining to cross the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures that frolic there. They cast off.

The first few days of sailing, though, turned out to be a disappointment. Many dreamers became seasick, and those who didn't were too busy sailing the ship to do any nursing.

Next, a few days later, just when most of the crew was feeling better, the ship a raging storm fell upon the ship. The dreamers feared for their lives then, and were so busy fighting for survival that they hardly had time to sleep and dream.

Finally, the storm also passed. Unfortunately, when the stars came out, the dreamers realized the gale had blown them far off course. So, they had a meeting. Some still spoke passionately of the dream and Promised Land. But others pointed out that the sails and masts were now battered and weak. They spoke of dwindling endowments, and fear of scurvy. Finally, the crew voted to give up their quest and sail for the nearest port. The dream would just have to wait; it was too impractical.

Just then, when it seemed that things couldn't get any worse, the dreamers' ship was becalmed. After the sea-sickness, the howling storms and the decision to give up, the wind stopped blowing. And as days turned into weeks, water ran low, food disappeared and the dreamers stopped dreaming altogether as they sank into despair.

Then, like the Psalmist, some of the crew raised their fists to heaven, and shouted "How long, O spinner of dreams? Will you forget us forever? How long will you hide your face from us?"

Some others just felt sorry for themselves, and they wept and whispered, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"

Others again blamed the captain, or the mate, or the chaplain, and muttered "How long will my enemies triumph over me?" Thus, as they pondered their painful lot, the dreamers were reduced to bitter remorse.

And what about us, here at Lawrence Park Community Church, on this Thanksgiving Weekend? We were moving through 2019 and 2020 to the power of a dream. We were fired up on account of Strategic Initiatives and SoulTable and a new minister. The Promised Land of ecclesial diamonds seemed as if it was within reach.

But COVID has becalmed us—not just here at church, but in our personal lives, and in our civic and family and work lives. Thanksgiving or not, most of us, are at least somewhat

discouraged and disheartened.

And so, with the Psalmist, I sometimes wonder too. "How long, O spinner of dreams? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Lately, I've been waiting for a miracle.

It isn't just COVID. It is climate change and the economy. It is concern for members of this church who can't get out of their homes. It is the American election and poverty and racism. It seems, to me, that all the troubles we could reasonably expect to face in the decade from 2020 - 2030 are coming home to roost these first few months of this year! And, honestly, it depresses me. I find it hard to get going some mornings. I am tired of trying of working so hard at church. My stomach is tied in knots about what has become of Soul Table. Like the Psalmist, I feel like shaking my fist at heaven.

But listen, if the Psalmist could do it, so can I and so can you. If the Psalmist could say it, then we can borrow his holy words and say it too. "How long, O God? Will you forget me forever?" Lately, I've been feeling spiritually and personally becalmed and beset. "Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death."

But, we have not yet come to the end of the story of the dreamers and their ship sailing to the Promised Land. When we last saw them, they were becalmed and drifting and blaming God. Most of the crew gave up hope, and hid wherever they could find some shade from the relentless sun.

A few of the dreamers, though, still dreamed. They walked the deck, occasionally, and searched the horizon. And one day, one of them noticed a bit of flotsam drift by. It made that person think. Next, she looked up into the sky and realized hers was a gull-chased ship. These things, the flotsam gulls, were rumors of glory.

You see, even if the wind doesn't blow, the sea currents flow. And that is how it came to pass that even as the crew raised their fists to heaven, the ship kept on drifting on the Gulf stream to a far shore. And even if it was not exactly the Promised Land they dreamed of, it was a safe harbor. The dreamers were—it seemed to them—miraculously delivered.

For some Christians, that is what the story of Jesus calming the wind and waves is all about. Just as in his day, Jesus brought the disciples safe to shore so Jesus will save us from all the storms of life, too.



But the Bible never promises us any such thing. The Bible never promises us that our journey through this life is going to be trouble free. Actually, the Bible speaks of the opposite; of hurting people stumbling under the weight of a sometimes sin-broken, groaning world. Jesus promised us crosses to bear. He said we would lose our lives before we found them back, that as Christians we would sometimes feel like strangers and aliens among the other people of this world. In a similar vein, the Psalmist complains that just when he most needs God, God hides his—or her—face.

So, what's the point? Well, for me it is the ship that goes to sea. It isn't just any ship. You see, since the very first days Jesus' disciples began meeting together, ships like that of the disciples on the storm-tossed sea have been seen as symbols for the church. The church as a ship is even evident in what we call the meeting hall, the sanctuary, of our building. It is called a nave, as in navigate or navy. This seventy-five-year-old church, people and buildings both, is our ship.

And in it, we find Jesus as our captain and each other as visionary crew. In this ship, we recall the many reasons we have to give thanks in spite of COVID. We are a caring community making a difference for each other and our nation, for refugees and inner-city children. The church is not merely a building, it is a community of care and concern that carries us through storms and is a shelter for us when we are spiritually becalmed. The church is God's design for getting us together to sail for promised land we hope for. The church is our bridge over troubled Covid waters towards each other and for justice and mercy in the world.

So, in the end, this Thanksgiving, raise a fist to heaven, if you must. If the Psalmist could do it, so can we.

But the same Psalmist, later, gave thanks for the earth, full of God's creatures, for the waters below, and the life it teams with. We give thanks for all the diamonds conjured by the wind and sea. And most especially, we give thanks that we are not alone. We are all together, here in this lovely boat, in God's ship. And together we will weather the storm and get safely to the other side.