

**Year B, Pentecost 5**

**June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**By Thomas L. Truby**

**Mark 4:35-41**

### **Do This and You Will Live**

“On that day,” the day in which he spoke in riddles, “When evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’” It was his idea to cross the Sea of Galilee. It would be time apart with his disciples. The narrator tells us that with the crowds he used parables while in private he explained everything to his disciples. Perhaps this would be a time when he would do some explaining.

“And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.” Why did the writer add “just as he was?” Was he sleeping at the time, exhausted by the crowd and they tucked him in at the back of the boat? Maybe he had fallen into one of those deep sleeps where you can still walk as long as someone guides you but you don’t actually wake up.

“Other boats were with them” A flotilla heading across the lake. Why did the writer add that? Is the narrator saying the issues being addressed and the truth being revealed is not just for those in the Jesus boat? Is the experience we are about to witness a communication for all humanity?

“A great wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” Annual Conference for the Oregon-Idea Conference of the United Methodist Church was last week in Boise. We were all in this boat called Annual Conference and wave after wave crashed over us. How do we maintain unity in the midst of conflict on sexuality that divides the Methodist Church so deeply? What about declining church membership and the graying of congregations? What do we do with the crisis at our southern border? Didn’t Jesus advocate for the stranger in our midst? We were being overwhelmed by the problems our world faces and the reality of our small boat.

Yuni, a beautiful young women, 22 years old and a student at Western Oregon University came to the microphone and told us that she had been born in Mexico and brought here as a young child. She was afraid for her future, grateful for the support she had received from the United Methodist Women and confident that no matter what happened to her, God was with her. There was emotion in her voice and we all knew she had arrived at her faith through sleepless nights and many tears. She begged us to remember the DACA kids and to urge our Senators and Representatives toward mercy and compassion. She then introduced her parents and they stood up, outing themselves as illegal immigrants. Our hearts wept as our boat took in water.

As the storm raged Jesus was in the stern asleep on a cushion. They woke him up. How do we explain Jesus sleeping through the storm? Is he making some point? Does the water not spray

on him? Is he demonstrating the depth of his belief in a benevolent God for whom there is no death beyond the power of resurrection? The disciples can't figure it out either and say, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" I wonder how many times Yuni and her family has asked that as the waves of potential violence have threatened to swamp their boat.

"He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."

This was not a riddle. This was something that happened and they felt it. The water had drenched their clothes and they had braced themselves against the force of the wind. And then Jesus commanded it to stop and suddenly it ended. How did they think about this? Did it remind them of the story of Jonah? Jonah, who thought the storm that threatened to sink their boat was about him, was thrown into the sea to calm it. He expected to die but a fish swallows him and spits him up on the shore. Were they tempted to throw Jesus into the sea? That would have to wait until the events of Holy Week. That's when he allows himself to be thrown into the sea of human violence.

Is Jesus showing them the power of God to bring peace amid the crashing waves of human violence? When the storms of human violence are raging at their worst will Jesus come again bringing instant calm? Some verses in the New Testament can be interpreted that way. Is Jesus providing an example of how his life, death and resurrection will ultimately calm the storms of human rivalry?

For Laura and me, the most poignant demonstration of sea-calming power at the Annual Conference occurred on Friday morning. CONAM, acronym for Committee on Native American Ministries, was scheduled to give a report. Duane, a tall Native American man, probably in his early 80's, who called himself a three legged, one leg a walking stick, came to the microphone. He said we should not be surprised if he keeled over before he finished what he was about to do. He said he had never done this before and it was one of the hardest things he had ever done.

Taking his walking stick he left the stage and slowly made his way to the table very near our own. A Native American couple and one other woman stood up and he stood before them. He said he had a confession to make and that he would be making it for himself and his ancestors.

He was of the Crow People and the Crow People always had good relations with the Nez Perce People. The Crow People even let the Nez Perce People hunt buffalo on their land. The Nez Perce People lived in the Wallowa Mountains; the beautiful northeast corner of Oregon often called the Oregon Alps and had lived there for generations.

In 1875 the Federal Government told the Nez Perce People they must leave their land and move to a reservation. Led by Chief Joseph they decided to make a run for Canada. When the Federal Government found out, they sent the cavalry to track them down. All summer and fall the cavalry pursued the Nez Perce People. The federal government hired Crow Indians as scouts who knew the land to help them. Duane's great, great, grandfather had been one of them. Duane then said in doing that the Crow People had not been good neighbors to the Nez Perce People. They had betrayed them and there had been a bad feeling between The Crows and the Nez Perce ever since. On behalf of himself and his people he said he was sorry and asked for their forgiveness.

The audience of four hundred fell into stunned silence. The sea of rivalry that perpetually churns among humans became dead calm. Every eye was riveted on this drama of "truth and reconciliation". As another Indian woman said later, "Duane's brave action had busted everything open."

Word had gone out among the Nez Perce that something like this was going to happen. The whole tribe had been invited. Arthur, his wife, whose name we did not get, and one other, were the only ones to respond. Hurt and hatred run deep and can last a long time in a culture. I couldn't hear what they said but I knew they were words of forgiveness.

Duane gave Arthur his walking stick. Arthur solemnly received it and said the Indian Way is always to give something back. Arthur took off the large emblem he wore around his neck; he called it his wampum, and gave it to Duane.

Coyote Marie, a woman of Cherokee heritage, whose ancestors had been forced to move from Georgia to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears, and who then escaped the Oklahoma Reservation and settled in southern Oregon, joined the group. She carried a fan made of eagle feathers. By turn she touched each person's head and heart ritually drawing out the poison and then using the eagle feathers she blew the poison away. We later learned the ceremony was called "a clearing."

The Committee on Native American Ministry had been asked to give a report on the Oregon-Idaho Conference's decision to give back to the Nez Perce People an acre and one-half of land we owned as part of our Wallowa Lake camp property. It was river bottom land the camp couldn't use but was perfect for spawning Sockeye salmon in an attempt to bring back the species to the high mountain streams.

In telling us of all this, CONAM give back far more than a report; they gave us a living example of truth and reconciliation. The theme of this year's annual conference was "Do this and you will live."

Thanks be to God. Amen.