



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

June 21, 2009

Proper 7B

Reverend Donna Barr

I vividly recall that beautiful day when our family joined with friends for an afternoon of boating and picnicking on Cumberland Lake. Our two families consisted of four parents and six children - all between the ages of 16 and 5. After a busy morning of skiing, tubing and swimming we headed off to a small cove for some lunch. We were so happy to be together, so engrossed in conversations, kids squealing with laughter and so busy preparing lunch that we did not even see the darkening clouds moving in around us. The storm rolled in so quickly and caught us by such surprise that we almost didn't have time to put the awning down over the top and sides of the boat. The day literally turned from blue sunny skies to pitch black in a matter of minutes. Rain as large and hard as rocks fell from the sky. Thunder clapping over our heads and lightening so close that we could feel it burning and hear it sizzling. Trying to put a positive face on things, the adults tried as we could, to reassure the children that this would pass quickly. But the children were not convinced and were at once silent and huddled close to their parents. The storm did not pass quickly enough for me. Even though it lasted only 45 minutes it seemed like 3 hours. We were all very afraid. Our beautiful day at the lake turned from an exciting adventure to a frightening scene.

In this morning's gospel reading, Jesus invites his friends on a boat ride crossing over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Before too long a storm comes rolling in, which was not an uncommon experience given that the Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills. The storm came up and became fierce; as waves beat against the boat they were all in, yet Jesus is fast asleep! For the disciples, this journey of a lifetime all of a sudden takes a terrifying turn. But they are also annoyed. I don't know about you but when I am subject to extreme feelings I expect others to share in that experience. No wonder, they give him a good shaking to get him back to consciousness. "Wake up! Wake up! Jesus, where are you? There is a terrible storm. Do something. Don't you care about us?" If they are going to be petrified the least that he can do is to

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share in their fear. But the response of the awakened Jesus is to speak words of peace and calm. "Be still", says our Lord to the wind and sea and the disciples.

And so part of an explanation of this encounter has to be about Jesus bringing peace to us at the times when we are troubled, the times when we are afraid and the times when our world is caving in. Discipleship is not always a state of peaceful calm. But the truth is some of our greatest adventures with Jesus will be in the storms of life, in the dead of night, when it's dark, and we're lost, not knowing where to turn or what to do next. I found this to be true in my own life. Some of my darkest moments have yielded the brightest light and the most calm. Interestingly, the most comforting scripture when my daughter was so ill, was not one about hope or faith or even prayer. What comforted me was the reassurance that no matter what happened God would not leave me abandoned and alone. His voice said, "Be still Donna and know that I am God."

As you are aware six members of our parish have now been studying the ministry of Pastoral Care for almost a year. One of the most important learning has been to understand the ministry of presence. Henri Nouwen describes this as "The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares." That is the ministry to which Jesus teaches us in the midst of the storm. Our goal as caregivers is to simply be fully present to the person who happens to be right in front of me. Imagine being fully present, giving your undivided attention (eyes, ears, mind and heart) to every person you meet in a day!

To serve someone is to be present to them, to pay attention to them, to not judge or make comments, but to listen and be open. So often in life we are never fully present to anyone. These are often the times in the midst of the storms that we, as caregivers and ministers finally get it. We finally realize we can't do it all ourselves, we finally realize it's not about us, we finally understand we need help, we need a savior, we need Jesus Christ to lead us through the eye of the

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storm to experience calm and serenity once again. And so as we care for those in grief, sickness or pain we want to extend Jesus' calm and his peace and his presence.

Today is a joyful time in the life of the church. As we welcome the newly baptized into the church this morning we will be reminded of Jesus' presence with us throughout our whole life. For we will proclaim that the newly baptized is sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ own forever.....that means from this day forth.....this means our whole life.....in good times and bad.....in the sunshine and in the darkness.....in the calm and in the storm.....God's presence and his peace will never leave us. Let us now be stillThank you Lord, that your loving mercy and compassion is with us always. Now and forever, Amen

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