

“Peace! Be Still!”

- I. Introduction: “Jesus . . . rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’” Then he turned to his disciples and asked them why they had so little faith. Why had they allowed their fear to overwhelm them? In this story, the disciples had a faith experience that allowed them to comprehend more deeply who Jesus Christ really is. In the Gospel of Mark the disciples often seemed utterly clueless. Scholars believe that this portrayal is at the heart of what the writer of Mark is attempting to do with his readers. Written not only to describe a series of events in the life of Jesus, this Gospel is meant to act as a mirror to all of us. The author intended to challenge us to respond to the questions of who we think Jesus Christ is and how much faith we have that Jesus can take care of us and help us deal with the storms in our lives. The narrative draws us into the stories, into the events, so that we identify with the disciples and learn what they learn. This is one of the core reasons that the stories are so important. They are meant to be studied, remembered, and passed from one generation to another in a sacred trust.

- II. This past week I encountered some stories of my own. I took a pilgrimage of sorts to the small town in which I grew up on the coast of southern New Jersey. I went to visit my uncle, the last remaining relative in my family from that generation. Several months ago, his wife, my aunt, died and I wanted to spend some time with him. We visited, we laughed, and he shared many family stories with me. We went to several gravesites that I could not have found on my own. While we knelt together to clean out the tall grass and weeds around the gravestones he told me things about my family that either I’d never known, or that I had known and forgotten. The stories were powerful and brought my family to life in a new way. They helped me understand why I have certain of the qualities and values that I have.

I’d like to share one example with you. My grandmother raised her three children, including my mother and my uncle, alone. Determined to keep her family together she went to work. She had only a fourth grade education because she’d dropped out of school to care for her six brothers and sisters. Therefore, the only job she could find

was a menial one, working as a maid twelve hours a day, seven days a week. She got no time off except for Sunday morning and earned \$9 each week. My uncle shined shoes, and my mother and aunt worked whenever they could. The family lived on that money. They had no refrigerator but cooled their food in a box set into a window and a block of ice in the summer. The children followed the coal truck to pick up pieces of coal to heat their home. Everyone in the family contributed and often went without so that others could have what they needed. And every week my grandmother took them to Sunday School and church.

As my uncle described my family, I realized that they had been strong, deeply strong. They worked very hard and had a high premium on caring for one another. As I listened to my uncle I could see how their stories, my family's stories, have been being lived out in my own life. My high value of my family, my strong sense of God's presence during times of challenge, and my empathy and desire to help others who are struggling to survive, particularly parishioners who are hesitant to let us know what they need. There were many other stories told on this visit that I will share with my children and my children's children. The stories that define us are very powerful, whether they are family stories or stories of our faith they deserve to be preserved and told.

III. Today is Father's Day – a good day to remember our heritage and the strength and wisdom of those who have gone before us, those on whom shoulders we now stand. We worship today with our own personal histories and our shared history as a part of the Christian church. One dimension of our shared history is captured in today's lectionary readings. It's present in the ancient Book of Job in which God spoke out of a whirlwind and reminded Job that God had created all that exists and had a plan for creation that far outstripped Job's capacity to comprehend. Job was led by God to accept God's love and wisdom, even in the face of terrible tragedy. In today's Gospel reading from Mark, we are reminded that we like the disciples, are on a faith journey and sometimes out of nowhere storms descend upon us. We can be very fearful and wonder where Jesus is when we need him. Like the disciples, many remember crying out to God and experiencing God's response in miraculous and mysterious ways. This is what the stories of our faith teach us – we do not need to be afraid, we are not alone, God is loving and wise, and that “all things work together for good for those who love the Lord.” The scriptures are filled with reminders that we should not be afraid but rely instead upon God's protection and care during challenging times.

IV. Today we are sitting on the pivot of time. We have been entrusted with the stories of those who have gone before us and charged with passing on the stories to those who will follow. It is up to us to help determine whether the stories of our faith will become blurry, out of focus, and perhaps even forgotten, or instead will be remembered, shared, and applied for generations to come. Opportunities to pass on our faith come in many forms. Sometimes these opportunities are predictable and at other times they catch us off guard. While on my pilgrimage this week my uncle, his son, and I spent an evening together. To my surprise twice that evening I was asked to share and explain my faith as a follower of Christ – once by my cousin who had had an unfortunate experience in the church while growing up and who now describes himself as a pagan. He asked me why I believe in Jesus Christ and after a long dialogue told me that if he lived here he'd come to Ascension and probably become a believer. This part of the story is not yet finished. The second opportunity came when my uncle asked me with great emotion whether I thought he'd be with my aunt again. They'd been married 58 years, and he misses her terribly. He began this question by affirming that he believes in Jesus Christ and that he will be in heaven with her forever. I concluded that evening with the realization that once again God had intertwined my story as an individual person with my story as a Christian. I believe that God meant for us to have this conversation on my brief pilgrimage. Perhaps it was for my cousin in order for him to hear about Christ in a different way, for my uncle to have his faith re-enforced in his grief, and/or for me to be further enlightened about how God has worked faithfully and positively in my family for several generations.

I also believe that God intends for those of us here today who are facing storms in our lives – about our health, our jobs, our finances, or our families – to hear the story of today's gospel. My brothers and sisters in Christ, listen to the stories of our faith, of our shared history . . . take them in, own them, see how they are taking place in the here and now in your own life and in the life of your family. Tell others how these stories have been enacted in your lives. Encourage others to hear the voice of Jesus say: *"Peace! Be still! I am with you."* Amen.