

6.20.21 L12P4 The One Who Cares and Rebukes Death

- When life is difficult or threatened, it is easy to wonder if God even cares about us
 - Right now we don't have to look very far for a difficult or threatening issue to wonder about God's love, all we have to do is look at the coronavirus pandemic
 - Over 600,000 people in the United States alone have died, including some people whom we love, and so it's easy, and almost natural to wonder if God cares
 - In the much broader view, church commentators have been predicting that some people will never return to church – first, because they are out of the habit, second because some have decided that their lives were not changed by not going to church, third because some people actually prefer looking at worship videos at a time that they choose, and some people... some people will stay away because they have experienced a crisis of faith due to the coronavirus pandemic and they have become disillusioned with God
 - And so probably some of us since last March when we had the first lockdown, have also wondered “Does God even care?”
- In the gospel reading for today, Jesus' disciples felt the same way
 - For them, the crisis was not a pandemic or a life-threatening illness – for the disciples it was a terrifying storm that raged and began to fill their boat with water
 - Meanwhile, in their terror while they were no doubt bailing water out of the boat like mad... meanwhile in their terror, Jesus was peacefully sleeping on a cushion in the back of the boat
 - Over the howling wind they screamed, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? [Mark 4:38]”
 - Then Jesus woke up, and his response astonished them. He rebuked, that is he commanded the storm to be quiet.
 - In the peaceful calm that followed, the disciples wondered, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? [4:41]”

- Now it might seem obvious to us, that only God could command a storm to be quiet, but that was not obvious to the disciples
 - In fact, especially in the gospel of Mark, nothing was ever obvious to Jesus' followers
 - Jesus healed the sick, and they wondered who Jesus was
 - Jesus fed the multitudes, and they wondered who Jesus was
 - Jesus even raised the dead, and they wondered who Jesus was
 - In fact it was only at the very end of the story, when Jesus was dying on the cross, when someone finally declared who Jesus was.
 - At the foot of the cross, the Roman centurion of all people, looked up at the dying Christ and declared, "Truly this man was God's son! [15:39]"
 - The gospel of Mark wants us to see beyond calming the storm – and beyond the healings, beyond the feeding, and beyond even raising the dead to life, to only finally see in Christ's death on the cross that there, and only there, is Jesus revealed as the Son of God
 - Then three days later, the women discovered that Jesus' tomb was empty, and so not just a thunderstorm, but even death itself had been rebuked and commanded by Jesus to be silent before him
- The Gospel of Mark would have us know that even in a pandemic, Jesus, the crucified and risen son of God truly cares
 - Only rarely does Jesus respond by calming storms, or miraculously drive away disease
 - Instead, Jesus has already done something much better and much more enduring than commanding the storm to stop – Jesus has rebuked sin and death and has commanded them to be silent not only for him, but also in the end, even for us
 - And that is the sign and promise that God really does care, and that Jesus really does love us
 - In the midst of the storms of life, our ending has already been written and decided

- And this promise of forgiveness and life offers us hope no matter what we face
- Now let me show you a picture that is a symbol of Christian hope in the face of storm
- This is the logo, or symbol of the World Council of Churches
- Formed as an ecumenical council of cooperating churches during the crisis of both World War II and the horror of the holocaust, this logo pictures the people of God in a boat on stormy water.
- And the mast of the ship doesn't have a sail – the mast is a cross, and around it is a Greek word that means “the household of the world”... the household of the world because nothing can bring humanity through the storms of life except the cross of Jesus Christ