

Sermon – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church, Florissant
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I am convinced that God is constantly working in our lives to help us see his presence among us. We are so often and so easily distracted, but God is trying to wedge in to our lives and say, look, I love you. there's a way we can do this, together.

Our gospel today tells that kind of story.
Just before our story today begins,
Jesus and the disciples worked together
and miraculously fed a crowd of over five thousand people.
Then, as we just heard - Jesus **made** his disciples,
the verb there is literally translated **forced** them,
to go across the sea of Galilea ahead of him.
So they set of in the S.S. Minnow.
Jesus stayed around to get everyone to leave.
Then he prayed.

Probably, he was praying for the disciples,
Praying for those in the crowd who wanted
to kill the Romans and make him king.

But while Jesus was praying
The wind set in.

*The weather starting getting rough,
The tiny ship was tossed,
If not for the courage of the fearless crew,
The minnow would be lost, the minnow would be lost.*

Boats are one of the most common symbols of the church.
Hence the phrase “we’re in the same boat.”

But I imagine that night,
when they had gotten in the boat
Somewhat reluctantly, and looked across the lake
they weren’t anticipating how long it was going to take,
how annoying the trip was going to be,
and how much they were each going to get on each other’s nerves.

There were twelve people crammed onto that fishing boat.
Twelve personalities,
twelve different sets of perspectives.

Some of them were doers.
You see a lot of doers in the church.
These were the disciples who got it done;
The first to launch the boat, pull the anchor,
hoist the sail, or sit at the rudder.
They were eager to get going,

and chagrined that others were not helping out.

Among them were probably the judges.

They were still thinking about how pathetic that crowd had been,
stuffing bread in their pockets

or trying to slip off with one of the bread baskets.

They were thinking about how Peter was too full of himself

Always repeating things Jesus said, like he was Christ himself.

Probably some of them were connectors,

making sure everyone was on the boat,

and did anyone need a sweater?

At least one of them was the slacker,

the one who said he had paid his dues last week

helping out during the boat ride.

There he went getting comfy on the nets

and letting others do the work.

And then there was Peter. Peter was the specialist.

He knew boats and he knew how to sail them.

He gave commands, micro-managed everyone,

and pushed them to get going out across the water.

They were all in this boat together.

Whether they wanted to be together or not,
they were all following Jesus command.
He said go, so they were going.
They all knew the goal ~
In their own unique ways, they were participating in it.

But then the wind came up.
It was strong and oppositional.
It blew in their faces
Just as they'd all settled down for a three hour tour.

Instead of going forward, the wind made the boat hesitate,
and then it started going backward.
Back toward the shore they'd left.
It was dark. It was cold.
The connectors again asked everyone did they need a sweater?
Anyone need a drink of water?
The doers grumbled as they were the first to get up
and work the ropes.

And Peter, of course, was the one to say,
now look guys, here's what we've got to do.
He explained the process of tacking
~ even though half of them knew how to sail against a wind
And could tack just as well as he did,

and why was he so full of himself anyway?

And so they worked

zig zagging against that strong headwind,

in the dark, in the waves ~

because this sea of Galilea was so shallow,

that the waves could really churn up fast.

It was miserable.

The curmudgeon on board was so unhappy,

he just humphed and grumbled

and said how annoying it was

that Jesus had told them to do this

and didn't even bother to help them

..and if it didn't get better soon, he was going home.

But there was no going home.

They were zig-zagging in the darkness of the lake,

and everyone was wet and tired

And ready to throw Peter overboard.

One of the disciples on board was an innovater.

He was the youngest disciple on board

And had just graduated from Galilean Nautical School.

He suggested they throw the anchor overboard

and just wait it out.

No! The whole group cried out.
We've been tacking the boat back and forth for hours.
We've always done it this way! We can't change now!
Yes, said the doers.
We've always done it this way.
James is on the rudder,
Thomas is on the ropes.
That's their job.
They've been doing them now for hours.

Peter agreed.
He continued to give commands
and everyone began to dream of launching him
over the side of the boat and making him swim!

Six hours.
Six hours they were bounced and splashed,
and blown in the darkness.
Nathaniel had been sick to his stomach since midnight.
Peter told him to buck up.
Matthew was muttering to himself about how he had the money
And when this nightmare was over,
He was going to leave this boat and buy a better one.

And then things got worse.

Nathaniel was the first to spot it,
due to being perched right on the edge of the boat
for medical reasons.

He thought it was a fog at first.

But then he realized, there was something out there
in all that chaos that was not tossed around.

It was floating, it was coming, it was a ghost.

Ghost!

Everyone turned to see it, everyone argued.

The doers said, this is what happens
when we don't all work together!

The connectors and the slackers cried out, we're gonna die
- but at least we're together.

Peter began to yell at everyone to calm down,
and at least one person said,

Oh go jump in the lake Peter!!

And as they were all arguing,
the ghost was coming closer.

Because they had stopped tacking,

They were now being blown backward,

So the ghost was coming fast.

And then... they realized it was Jesus.

They cried out in relief, “Oh it’s only Jesus,”
We thought he was a ghost – they chuckled.

And Peter, being the big overblown guy that he was,
(and possibly thinking he was about to be thrown overboard anyway)
said to Jesus,
Command me to come to you on the water.
This annoyed everyone for their own particular reasons.

Some said, “we’ve never done it that way”
others said, See, this proves he’s so full of himself.

But Peter ignored them.
Peter walked out onto the water to see Jesus.
And some of the disciples were jealous
and wished he would fail.
And he did.
He got scared, and he sank,
and he cried out in fear. “Jesus, save me!”

Jesus lifted him up and said,
you of little faith why did you doubt?

I wonder if Jesus answered him. I wonder if he said,
I doubted I would ever be able to do what you do.

I wonder if any of us will ever become like you.
We've been making each other miserable.

For the disciples in the boat,
It was so gratifying to see Peter sink,
it was so wonderful to see Jesus being Jesus
– walking on water,
Believing so much better of them
than they could believe for each other.

LONG PAUSE

Jesus and Peter got back into the boat.
And Peter was quiet.
Then the wind got quiet.
The doers set the sail for the shore.
The connectors made sure everyone was comfortable.
Some Disciples reconciled with their own bad attitudes
and settled into the stillness,
focusing on the shape of Jesus in their midst.
Nathaniel fell asleep.

It was still pitch dark, but there was peace.
And in the darkness,
even though they couldn't see him

except when the moon came out from the clouds,
they knew Jesus was there.

Beloved, we are in the boat together.
We serve a God who didn't
just force us into this boat
and abandon us centuries ago.

We serve a savior who is with us,
among us,
even with our foibles and our grievances,
Jesus is in this boat of St Barnabas.
And whenever we think all is lost.
Just when we think we'll never make it to the other side,
When we're arguing, and saying
"We've never done it that way before"
may we see Jesus.
May we welcome the way Jesus is revealed to us
in the most annoying people and situations.

And may we be ready to do the new thing
that will bring Jesus more clearly into the boat.
Whatever that may be.

Amen.