

## **Fourth Sunday After Pentecost (June 21, 2015)**

I still remember the very first time I saw Lake Michigan. It was nearly six years ago, and I was visiting Chicago to tour the school that I would soon attend for seminary, the University of Chicago. During my visit I found myself with some time to spare, and so I walked from the University's campus in Hyde Park to Promontory Point, a beautiful park that juts out into Lake Michigan. When I first caught sight of the lake, I couldn't believe it. It was a perfect October day, and under a clear, blue sky, the smooth, light blue water stretched to the city's skyline and then beyond, off into the distance as far as the eye could see until it transformed into a perfectly straight line at the horizon. Like many others who see the lake for the first time, I asked myself: "Is this really a lake? It seems more like an ocean, stretching off into the distance as far as the eye could see." As far as I could tell, standing where I was there on the shore, the lake might well have stretched off into the distance forever.

A year later, as I was getting newly settled in the city, I had the opportunity to see Lake Michigan from a very different vantage point. Like any good tourist or newcomer, I visited the Sears Tower and took the elevator all the way up to the Skydeck on the 103rd floor. It was another clear day, and I marveled at the incredible view of the city, of Lake Michigan, and oh--what's that on the other side of the lake? It's Indiana, the map on the wall told me. The weather was so clear that day that from the 103rd floor of the Sears Tower, I could see all the way across Lake Michigan to Indiana.

My vantage point from the 103rd floor was very different than my perspective standing on the shore at Promontory Point one year earlier. While from the shore it looked like the lake went on forever, stretching endlessly to the horizon, from the 103rd floor I could see the truth: that the lake does not in fact go on forever, that it has a shore on the other side that's actually not that far away in Indiana.

Today's gospel reading also takes place at a lake, although it's a lake much smaller than Lake Michigan, a lake known as the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and his disciples are crossing the lake in a small boat when a great storm comes upon them. As the wind howls around them and waves wash into the boat and fill it with water, the disciples panic; they think that the boat will surely sink and they will drown in the lake. It's almost as if they've forgotten that God's own Son is right there in the boat with them.

Jesus isn't concerned at all about what's going on; in fact, he's sleeping right through it! But the panicked disciples wake him up, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to die?" And of course Jesus wakes up and miraculously calms the wind and the sea.

But for me it's what happens next that's really the linchpin of the story: When I used to hear this story as a child, I'd always expect Jesus to say, "Thanks for waking me up there so I could save us! Otherwise I might have slept through it all and we'd have all drowned."

But he actually says something quite different--Jesus asks the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

I can only imagine that they were flabbergasted, not only because Jesus had just performed a stunning miracle, calming the raging sea and howling wind, but also because Jesus was telling them that despite the raging sea and howling wind and the fact that their boat was filling up with water -- they should not be afraid. How? How can this be possible when storms rage all around us?

And yet--Jesus was not afraid, despite the fierce storm, and he doesn't think that the disciples should have been afraid, either. Jesus was not afraid because he saw something different than what the disciples saw. While the disciples couldn't see past the storm clouds and whitecaps raging around them, Jesus saw past it all to the truth of God's ultimate plan--and so he was at peace, completely free from fear and in fact, blissfully asleep.

That storm around the boat was very real, and the disciples' fear was very real, but if they had been able to see past it all through the eyes of faith, to see God's ultimate plan, like Jesus their trust in God would have brought them peace instead of fear. If like Jesus they had been able to see the view from the 103rd floor, the big picture view of the ultimate truth of God's plan for them and the world--they would not have been afraid. From inside that boat, nothing seemed more real than that storm, just as from the shore Lake Michigan looks like it goes on forever even though from the 103rd floor we can see that it actually doesn't. Yet there is nonetheless a deeper reality that can be glimpsed through the eyes of faith, a 103rd floor view that reveals a different, truer horizon of God's plan for our lives and our world. And when through faith we can shoot up to the 103rd floor and glimpse this deeper, truer plan and glimpse what God is really up to and realize that that matters more than anything else, more than whatever storms rage around us--then and only then can we know God's deep peace that passes all understanding.

Storms rage all around us in our lives and in our world, and they can be truly awful and terrifying and heartbreaking. Relationships strain and break. Loved ones die. Sickness torments us and those we love. Anxiety and worry and stress consume our waking moments and maybe even our dreams. Horrific violence shocks us and terrifies us, as when a young man possessed by racist hatred walks into a church bible study and starts shooting.

These are the very real storms we face, these are the waves that wash over our boat and begin to fill it with water and threaten to sink it.

The promise of the gospel is that through it all, no matter how dark it gets, no matter how frightened or anxious or heartbroken or lost we feel, God is right there with us in the boat, strengthening us for the journey, comforting us, and giving us eyes of faith to see God's plan for our lives and our world, giving us eyes of faith to see God working in the midst of our despair to bring new life out of death. And when we see this, when we

get that 103rd floor view of what God is up to, when we catch a glimpse of God at work in our lives and our world, then, even in the midst of the storm, we feel God's peace.  
AMEN.