

“at camp” (10June18)

Mark 4:36-41; Colossians 3:12-17

I'd like to start by telling you where these readings came from (I mean, besides from the Bible).

The Mark reading is the theme verse for the UCC Wis. Conference annual meeting this weekend. For those of us who are Lutherans, this is the UCC version of a synod assembly; where our South-Central Synod of Wis. covers a swath across from the Dells and down except for La Crosse and Milwaukee that are their own synods, the Wis. Conference covers the whole state.

They're using this passage of Jesus stilling the storm along with a question asking what we have to fear or why would we be afraid. So we heard the reading to connect to that broader work and theme.

Colossians was suggested by Roger Williams. He's a Hope member helping to lead the version of this service back on Old Sauk Road. (I've been using that odd phrasing of location, because I don't want to say it's back “at church,” since the church isn't a building but is the group of people. We are also church, also the MCC gathered out here in the woods.)

Anyway, Roger thought Colossians was helpful to hear these days, speaking to him of tolerance, and commending to us ways to practice loving our neighbor in times when it can be exceptionally difficult.

That's where these readings came from. Besides that, I expect you probably heard them in your own way, that God was speaking to you through them, into your own situations.

For us together, I want to jump in with one word that stood out to me as tying the two passages together: Peace. With Jesus, Peace came up as he was rebuking the stormy waters, at least in this version saying, “Peace. Be still.” In Colossians, it was this verse: “Let the Peace of Christ reign in your hearts.”

Getting going this morning with Peace, one way to think about it may be because we're outside, in this place. Most of us camped. It's the

kind of activity that goes with the phrase “getting away from it all.” It's quieter and calmer than the typical commotion of our TV- and computer- and car- and work- and school- agenda-filled lives. We just kind of get to BE. We have time for conversations. To play. To explore. We notice the world around us in nature. We pause to eat together. I like to sleep outside at least once each month to be sure I'm connecting to this. So clearly it's vital to me.

And we're having worship out in the forest, with native prairie nearby, in contact with sun and rain, birds joining our songs of praise to God, and maybe somehow also the mosquitoes. I believe that's really important: that's what true worship should be like. When we're too closed off and shut in on Old Sauk in the building, we miss some of what worship should be, miss some of the Peace and relationship God intends for us.

But I also confess that this isn't fully peace for me. We're out of our usual element, so I've fretted more than usual about this service, about getting communion stuff together, about how music will go, about who's going to jump in to each role, about whether we'll all be able to find our way here. I've been unable to picture and plan even for where I'd be standing to give these words. And, yes, I worried about mosquitoes and raindrops interrupting us. So I'm not entirely peaceful.

That shows one definition of Peace; it can mean something like “carefree.” We may feel at peace when we're at ease, not worrying, when everything comes simply.

So you may be part of this worship service in a calm state of mind, feeling like you left some hectic things behind as you came out to camp. Or you may be short on peace. You may not have slept all that well in your tent last night. You may have been confused in how to get here. You might just feel that this is different. So it may not fit that first definition of peacefulness.

That parallels the Boundary Waters trip that starts as three groups of us head north tomorrow for a week canoeing in the wilderness. In some sense, that is definitely meant to be “away from it

all,” including for MCC youth as a relief from the rigors of the school year. 23 of us will be away from screens and news about nukes and celebrity gossip and tests and noise.

But this Gospel reading reminds us that getting away from the crowds can't be equated with Peace. The followers of Jesus may have been dealing with one kind of unrest while the crowds were around. But, when they got away from it all, they were in a boat and ran into a fearful storm. So it may be that when we're trying to get far that it's out in our boats, floating in a canoe up north, that we have to face storms that really make us feel we're short on Peace.

That reminder may be instructive, while also not feeling very helpful. The storms may be metaphorical, being bombarded by all that life so constantly throws at you. But a change in location doesn't seem like it can offer resolution. Just getting out on the lake or away at camp doesn't directly equate with Peace.

The point of the Bible readings is that Jesus is the one who brings Peace. He speaks it into the midst of our storms. Or, to be more precise, he shouts it. Our translation says peace, but what Jesus says to the storm is like, “Muzzle it! Shut up!” That's not a very peaceful declaration. It's certainly not a “can't we all just get along?” It's not a soothing calming voice of “take it easy, okay?” or “is there anything that would help your mood?” Jesus seems anything BUT peaceful as he demands peace.

That seems important. Peace isn't about an internal state of calm or absence of conflict with everything being nice. Instead, it can be a declaration into the midst of chaos that there's something more important, something connected to Jesus. That is the heart and identity of peace, not just that all is going how you'd prefer.

For that sense of what we'd prefer, I can't help but notice the disciples' reaction. They ask, “Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?” They notice that the storm responds to Jesus' call for peace, but they themselves somehow remain unconvinced and unmoved by it. The rain, the tide, the wind—even the

mosquitoes—somehow listen to Jesus. But we, his followers, are the ones who won't.

We could rephrase the question. Instead of them asking, “Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?” we might say, “Who are we, that when even the wind and sea obey him, we still don't?” The one who can insist on Peace for the physical storms is calling to you, too, to insist on Peace for your storms, and are you listening?

In that way, it's not about location, about feeling that things are going just swell, that you've found the perfect place of ease. It's not even that the storms stop for you to rest through. Rather, Jesus calls Peace into the very mess and destruction and worry that surrounds you. It is there that he speaks and takes control. It is when camping doesn't seem so easy. It's for bad weather in the Boundary Waters. It is as you drive back to town and to the busy rhythms. It is when clearly so much in this world is not as it should be.

Jesus rebukes that. He tells those stormy voices that bombard you to shut up. He won't stand for you being assaulted by anything threatening to overcome you. Because those are not what is most important. Just as your inner contentment or serenity is not the definition of Peace, neither will he allow the nastiness to swamp you. He muzzles those domineering voices that claim top place.

That is why we worship, even in this place: To hear again the voice of Jesus as Lord, to be reassured that it is his Peace that reigns in your hearts and comes to define your life. The Peace the world cannot give, but that he insists on so extravagantly and miraculously and abundantly for you. “Peace. Be still” says Jesus. He calls you to rest secure, and to arise again to confront the storms, to persevere, to face fearfulness with confidence that God is love, that Jesus is Lord, and that you belong to him, now and forever.