

FACING STORMS
Randall Tremba
June 21, 2015
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Mark 4:35-41

When evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us go to the other side of the lake." And so they left in a boat. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat. The boat was swamped. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; his disciples woke him up, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?"

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith, no trust?"

And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

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This past Wednesday night a storm of rage, fear and hatred struck the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. A young white American bred on fear and bigotry unleashed a terrorist attack killing nine innocent, defenseless black people.

We've seen this storm before. We've seen the guns blazing. We've seen the flags of bigotry defiantly waving in the South. We've seen civil rights trampled. And we've seen our government spend years and years and billions and billions of dollars hunting foreign terrorists overseas while white supremacists in our own land attend training camps to learn the ways of terrorism.

Maybe the Charleston shooter was mentally ill; but if so, it's mental illness of a different order, intentionally bred and carefully cultivated in a certain particular soil with certain particular ideas.

Who or what will stop the madness here, over there and everywhere before we all perish? What on earth is greater than this violence, bigotry, hatred and fear?

The day after the church massacre, one of the sons of a victim offered this: "Love is always stronger than hate, so if we just love the way my mom would, then the hate won't be anywhere close to where love is. We've come together as a community to try to get past these things. A tragedy has happened, but life is going to go on and things are going to get better."

That young man didn't arrive with such strength and compassion overnight. That young man had taken to heart and cultivated over time these words from Martin Luther King: "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. The one who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies."

What on earth is greater than violence, bigotry, hatred and fear? Do we have it in us to repel, subdue and transform such violence?

"Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus woke up—which is to say, Love woke up—and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a calm. And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

And who is this that stood up on Friday in a Charleston court and looked into the face of the one who just two days before murdered her grandmother in cold blood and said: *I forgive you*. Who is this that can calm the raging storm of anger and howling winds, calling for revenge and say, *I forgive you*?

Where does power like that come from? And where have we heard that before? Many places, actually, but one place close to home is Nichols Mine, PA.

In October 2006, a man shot and killed five Amish school girls in cold blood and then took his own life. Within hours, leaders and members of the Amish community went to console the killer's wife and family and would eventually set up a charitable fund for the shooter's children. "We must not think evil of this man," said the grandfather of one of the slain school girls.

Love woke up—and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a calm. And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Where does power like that come from? Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

And who is this that can stand and look into the face of the one who just two days before murdered her grandmother in cold blood and say, "You took something very precious away from me. I will never talk to my grandmother ever again. I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you and will have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people, but I forgive you."

I don't know where strength and compassion like that comes from. But it comes. Sometimes it's just a matter of waking up the power that lies dormant in your heart.

I know some of you are facing storms of a different nature today, storms that pound you with wave after wave of grief, bitterness, anxiety or fear of what may be. Some of you are facing existential threats. Some of you have been hurt and hurt badly and you want revenge. And that's normal. Anger is a healthy human response to insult, injury and injustice. But now and then we catch a break. We get a chance to choose a different way to respond. It's a moment of grace; it's a moment for healing.

Storms arise and tempest blow. It's part of life. But it doesn't mean we are helpless or doomed. For there is within us, before us, behind us, underneath and over us, a light, a healing peaceful presence that is stronger than our fears and greater than our sorrows.

May that healing light flood our hearts, this community, our nation and the world. May all peoples and nations, all creatures great and small, and Mother Earth herself be blessed with deep, holy, wholesome and abiding peace now and forever.