

In the part of Mark's Gospel that comes just before the story we heard this morning, the Gospel tells us that Jesus had been teaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; and the crowd that had come out to listen had grown so large that Jesus got into a boat and told his stories from there. He told the story of the farmer who scattered his seed on the ground; he talked about putting a lamp on a lamp-stand instead of hiding it under a bushel-basket; he talked about the tiny mustard seed growing into a huge shrub that provides a shady nesting place for the birds of the air.

Mark tells us that with many such parables Jesus spoke the word to the people as they were able to hear it. At the end of the day Jesus was worn out. He had given the people everything he had. So Mark writes that when evening had come Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side."

The other side was Gergesa in the Decapolis, which was a federation of 10 cities in eastern Palestine, and the reason Jesus wanted to go there was because it was away from the area where he was well-known. It was a place where he could retreat with his closest circle of friends for some respite and relief.

But on the way across the sea a violent windstorm came up. This was the kind of storm that was common when the wind was out of the north and got funneled through the narrow valley at the upper end of the Sea of Galilee. On this evening, as the wind began to rage, Jesus had fallen asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat. And the disciples, even though some of them had made their living on the water and would have had experience with these storms, the disciples were terrified. And who knows, maybe the ones who knew the storms the best were the ones who were the most afraid.

So, one or more of the disciples crawled to the stern of the boat where Jesus was sound asleep. They woke him up and asked, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus was peacefully sleeping, and the disciples woke him up. Did you know that researchers have discovered that one of the things that unsettles and annoys young children more than anything else is when their parents take naps? Have you experienced that first-hand, either as a child or a parent?

I can sure remember it. "Dad, dad, dad, are you asleep?" "Not anymore I'm not!" Most kids hate it when a parent is taking a nap, and that's a natural part of the behavior of a young child. A sleeping parent elicits the same question the disciples asked Jesus: "Don't you care?" A young child is naturally concerned and afraid when the parent seems unavailable. He's afraid that maybe the parent won't wake up, and he'll be abandoned. She's concerned because she might need something and the parent won't be there to help.

That's why early childhood-development experts tell us that a young child will become very attached to what they call "transitional objects." The transition is from dependence to independence, and the object might be a blankie, or a woobie, or some favorite stuffed animal. These objects offer reassurance to the child that everything is going to be all right, and that transitional object, whatever it is, might go everywhere with that child for a long, long time until it is reduced to an unrecognizable lump of gray fuzz.

But then one day when the child is older, more confident, more mature, the binkie, or the bear, or whatever it has been, won't be needed anymore. That little person who was so needy, so dependent, grows, with the gifts of time and love and encouragement, into a person who is mature and self-reliant and willing and able to take risks. When that happens the future begins to unfold for that person with unnumbered possibilities for growth and success.

In the Gospel story this morning, after Jesus had quieted the storm, he turned to the disciples and he asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

That may sound harsh under the frightening circumstances, but what Jesus was doing was challenging his friends to grow up. These were not children. These were adults who had heard Jesus teach and seen him at work, and now this same Jesus was challenging them to become the mature believers they needed to be in order to claim a mature faith that would enable spiritual growth and health.

The challenge to all of us this morning is to do the same thing. It's a challenge to grow up and to give up the notion that we need to have someone hold our hand and walk us into the kingdom of God. While we were young we had our transitional objects. We're older now but not all of the transitional objects have been set aside. Away from the church, what about our cars and our clothes and or wine bottles? And within the church it's Rite I or Rite II, or a particular kind of music, or that perfect parish with that perfect priest, saint so-and-so.

But whatever our transitional objects might be, today Jesus is calling us to become mature believers who acknowledge their fundamental dependence on God, and at the same time are willing and able to accept responsibility for their personal spiritual growth and development. That means being willing to wrestle with some difficult questions for which there are no simple answers. It means engaging in tough discussions and maybe making some unpopular decisions. It means doing what is right instead of what's easy. It means dealing with all of the storms that confront us in life, the problems with relationships, the financial crises, the temptations and the distractions and anything else that threatens to throw our little boats onto the rocks or send them to the bottom of the sea. It means doing everything we can to live lives that demonstrate that we are growing into the full stature of Christ and that we have embraced the ministry of reconciliation that has been given into our care.

Reconciliation — establishing and maintaining friendship, working for resolution, offering radical hospitality and inclusion, fostering

compatibility and cooperation, seeing Christ and serving Christ in all of humankind.

It would be hard for me to imagine a time when this ministry of reconciliation could be more important than right now. We are grief-stricken and disgusted following the brutal murder of nine defenseless people during a Bible study at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. It is our vocation as followers of Jesus to work for reconciliation among people of different races and ethnicities. It is our vocation as followers of Jesus to encourage healthy, common sense dialogue and to work for reconciliation among people with firmly held and vastly different opinions about the place of firearms in American society. It is our vocation as followers of Jesus to repudiate any attempt to shrug off this tragedy with comments such as, "Oh well, these things happen," or "How are you going to stop the actions of a lone, deranged hatemonger?"

The fact that we're twenty-five hundred miles away from Charleston is no excuse for us not to claim this ministry of reconciliation and to engage in this ministry of reconciliation in any and every way we can.

Jesus is no longer asleep in the stern of the boat. He has ascended to God where he is waiting and watching for us to become mature in our faith. But just as he promised, he has not left us to do what we need to do on our own. The Holy Spirit is in this place, and the Holy Spirit lives within each one of us.

Be not afraid. We can set aside all of our transitional objects. We have nothing to fear, and Jesus needs us to stand up and to speak up in his Name.

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