

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

I have seen many storms in my life

but I have never experienced a storm at sea.

For that I am profoundly thankful.

Just watching what a storm can do on Lake Michigan

from a safe vantage point on the shore

is impressive enough.

One summer when I was a young man,

my family rented a cabin, well a house really, right on Lake Michigan.

The cabin was about 50 feet back from the beach behind a steel seawall.

During a storm that began one afternoon and continued throughout the evening,

waves crashed into the seawall with tremendous force,

throwing water far up into the air

In a spectacular display of nature's fury.

We could feel the vibration of each wave crashing into the seawall;

The energy radiating through the sand,

up into the foundations of the house

and coming to us through the floor joists

and into the soles of our feet.

It wasn't much, but it was a distinct "thrum."

Needless to say none of us slept well that night.

The following year,

when we were exploring the possibility of renting the cabin again,

we discovered that the cabin had completely collapsed

during a November storm.

That is the closest I have ever been to foundering in a ship at sea,

and that is frankly, as close as I ever want to get.

In the Gospel,

Jesus and the disciples head out across the Sea of Galilee in a boat.

In the beginning there are other boats with them,

but a storm arises

and soon they are alone

at the mercy of wind and wave.

I am told that, like on Lake Michigan,

storms blow up quickly on the Sea of Galilee.

There are four seasoned fishermen among the disciples,

Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

They all have experience sailing those waters,

but they find themselves helpless before the ferocity of the storm.

Their boat is taking on water faster than they can bail it out.

The wind is tearing at their sail.

The sound of the flapping sail is a loud cracking

that almost drowns out the singing of the rigging in the wind.

Lightening illuminates wave tops torn away by the wind

before darkness again closes around them.

In the midst of this chaos of noise and spray and lightening and darkness,

Jesus sleeps on a cushion in the stern of the boat.

The disciples misinterpret the signs of hope they are given

as they are overwhelmed by their fear.

They think that they have been abandoned by their Lord

and come to him in desperation,

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

This is a prayer that God hears, sadly, with great regularity.

It may even be the most common prayer of all

because so many of us don't even consider prayer

until we get in way over our heads,

until we are taking on water faster than we can bail.

It is the panicked prayer that comes to our lips before we even have time to think.

It is the prayer uttered even by those who don't normally pray.

It is the "Oh God" we say when we hear of a loved one's death

or receive a diagnosis of cancer.

It is the "Jesus" that escapes from our lips when we come upon a terrible accident.

Even those of us who come to church every Sunday

are prone to forget about God working in our lives until something goes wrong.

It is sad really,

because that is what the incarnation is really all about -- God with us.

Though we call the church God's House,

God isn't really here...

unless we are.

And we forget that God goes with us

out the doors of the church on Sunday morning at the end of worship;

that God is there in the pile of stuff on your desk at work;

or in the dishes in the sink at home;

or in the fields where we play.

God is with us in all the big AND little doings of our lives.

It is so easy to forget.

Why is it that we associate "Acts of God" with tragedy.

Is not a cool breeze on a hot afternoon,

or a painted sunset on an inland sea

just as much an act of God as a tornado that levels a town?

Why do we constantly forget that simple truth.

Why does it *take* a tornado or a sudden death to get our attention.

God showers love on us every hour of every day

and we so often miss it completely,

running through life like a commuter

running in the rain from train to car;
shoulders hunched, our belongings held above us
trying to fend off the water.

Why is it that our boat needs to be sinking before we go to the Lord?

Why do we need to feel abandoned,

or worse oppressed, by God

before our prayers take on any reality or urgency?

I don't know why.

And I wish it weren't true,

But that seems to be the way we are in spite of our best intentions.

In the past decade,

again and again

we have been confronted by a resurgence of overt acts of racism.

America's original sin has risen up again like a storm at sea,

threatening to overwhelm us.

Whether it was the White Supremacist march in Charlottesville,

the multiple incidents of shootings of people of color

by law enforcement personnel with questionable grounds,

or the use of terror tactics against families trying to enter the country

by immigration enforcement personnel on our southern borders,

the storm is rising.

And it is a storm of our own making.

We are forced to face the stark reality

that racism continues to thrive in our country

because we lack the moral courage to address it

and end it.

The truly frightening thing for me is that racism is not natural.

It is something we actually choose to do to ourselves.

Racism is a social construct that is taught by people to their children.

Through an alchemical mix of toxicity and inactivity of white people,
and even some people of color,
we allow this to happen
again and again and again.

It must stop.

We, the white people of the USA, must stop it.

We can no longer afford to be nice or polite.

We can no longer afford to look the other way, or make excuses.

It is time to act.

It is time for each of us to act.

As a follower of Jesus

I have done my best to unlearn the racism that has crept into my life.

My wife and I have done our best

to raise two boys who are as free from racism as they can be
as white men raised in a predominately white suburb.

I think we have done a good job,

but more and more it has become clear to me
that it isn't enough.

Not nearly enough.

We must do more.

Our inactivity is killing people.

And it has been for far too long.

I do not know the answer.

I am sure it will be complex and difficult.

To many of us it will feel like giving something up;

something we feel entitled to;
something we feel we have earned.

I know it will require the best of us; the best of all of us.

At least once a year I try to preach on the sin of racism.

And every time the tickler comes up in my calendar

I wonder if I am doing enough.

And I prepare for the push back I will get

from those who feel that this is politics and not church.

Is racism a sin? Yes!

Can we honestly say that the sin of racism no longer infects our society? No!

Should not we be doing all in our power to fight that sin? Yes!

Do we have a chance to heal this breach?

Were it just up to us, it would be beyond us I am sure.

But we are not alone.

As followers of Jesus we know that we have God, and God's grace on our side.

Like the disciples, we have seen the miracles.

We have heard the parables.

We know what is possible.

And so the words of Jesus in the boat that we heard this morning sting a little.

“Why are you afraid? Have you *still* no faith?”

If we are honest, they sting a lot.

We still have so much work to do, and it is far too late in the day.

We should start with prayer. It is, after all, what we're good at.

But it mustn't end there.

We have been praying far too long.

Let us pray.

O God, you made us in your own image

and redeemed us through Jesus your Son:

Look with compassion on the *whole* human family;

take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;

break down the walls that separate us;

unite us in bonds of love;

and work through *our* struggle and confusion

to accomplish *your* purposes on earth;
that, in your good time,
all nations and races may serve you in harmony
around your heavenly throne;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And dear God,

don't let us stop there.

Give us the courage to be your agents of justice and mercy,
while we make your love known and felt by all we meet.

Amen.