

Christ Episcopal Church
2 Emerson Street (at the corner of
Gregory Boulevard)
East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855-1330

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 7 (B)

June 20, 2021

DRAFT

“The challenge of change”

9 AM Sermon

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 4:35-41

**There is both danger and reward
when we cross over to follow Christ.**

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked

the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 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?”

Help us, Dear Lord, to trust your love and your care.

Amen.

There is both danger and reward when we cross over to follow Christ.

The day the two World Trade Towers fell, I received an email from my bishop of New Jersey that said, Go and volunteer in a hospital. He had been suddenly discharged soon after surgery when the doctors asked him if he could walk and he said he could. They thought they would need his bed for some of those wounded by the fall of the Twin Towers. He was in a hospital in New Jersey. As it turned out, only about 450 were wounded, the rest either escaped or they didn't. I walked down that evening after receiving that email first to Bellevue Hospital—I was the only priest of that

diocese who lived in New York. At Bellevue they said only five patients had been moved there and there were five chaplains who showed up, so they were well covered. So I called Jan and asked her where the other hospital taking in the injured was located. I had heard of Trauma One but had no idea where it was. We determined that Trauma One was St. Vincent de Paul Hospital and was located somewhere near Seventh Avenue and Eleventh Street. When I came to Fourteenth Street, there were police barriers cordoning off all of lower Manhattan. It turns out that a large gold

depository had been covered by the falling Trade Center buildings. A kind NYPD officer allowed me passage and I finally located the hospital. I simply walked in the front door, there were no guards or receptionists, and as I looked around -- on all the chairs and sofas on the waiting area of the First Floor white sheets were covering everything; they were expecting so many injured to be sent there. On the entry dock where emergency ambulances would discharge patients, almost every medical person in the hospital was patiently awaiting the influx of hundreds or thousand of

injured. No one came in. The ambulance bays were completely silent. All who were rescued in the first effort had already been admitted, about 450, the same number of the emergency first responders who had perished in the collapse. No more rescued came in. I asked a few people sitting in some of the chairs where to find the Roman Catholic chaplain, but no one knew. Finally someone suggested I go up to the Second Floor and find the Chapel as a mass was scheduled to begin shortly. I found the Chapel and sat near the front. The Chaplain came in and sat at the front right side of the

Chapel in prayer. The chapel was filled and dead silent. The priest said the Mass, I did not partake, and at the end I immediately tried to find the chaplain but to no avail.

Finally someone said to go up to the Fourth Floor, and I did, and there he was walking around. I introduced myself and asked if he needed help—he was all alone with only nurses and the injured in every room. He said he could use some help and handed me a list of about twenty patients whom he said ‘were having trouble’. So I began my rounds, never having been a hospital chaplain and went from person to person,

and indeed they were having trouble. Falls were the predominant injury—being trapped by the enormous asbestos cloud and not being able to see or breathe, or expelled out the front door when the accordion-like collapse occurred, or free falling in an elevator. I had never spoken to so many traumatized people. I came home that night and sat in front of the television until I finally fell asleep. The next day I was so burnt out that I stayed home and went in the next day. This practice of a day on and a day off continued for about three weeks. Finally the last patient was discharged; all

had survived to live another day. The patient who was on the front page of the New York times seated on a wall just before the building collapses began, covered with blood and holding her head was one of my patients. We still exchange Christmas greetings—she is a non-religious person, but we still write a few words of encouragement to each other annually.

The storm I experienced maybe wasn't a physical storm on a sea, but I got a sense of what a disciple may have felt when the waves were so fierce on the Sea of Galilee. I had taken that person medical help when

she had almost died; the experience of saving lives suddenly lit a spark in me that I am pursuing now in medical school.

Storms can and do change us.

Possibly you can remember a storm in your own life, that Christ brought you through, and now you are on the other side maybe still trying to figure out Christ's message to you from that storm. Do listen to the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit. You have a mission. You have seen the worse, and the worse did not overcome you. We have been saved for a purpose.

My church in New Jersey was often tetering on the edge of insolvency, but somehow we always managed to stay afloat. The storm did not over come us, and the storm will not overcome Christ Church either. The storm has a reward at the end if we only have courage to see it through with the help of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is indeed a little jarring to hear Jesus chastise the disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” They had fed five thousand with a few fish and barley loaves; they had seen a multitude of people with all sorts of maladies being healed; they had

experienced Jesus' incredible powers first hand. And they still were afraid.

Fear can be paralyzing. Fear can immobilize the strongest of us. Fear can easily take control of our lives.

We are not called to do the impossible, alone, but we are called to do the impossible with God's help.

At one point we all thought covid might never end, but its end is now clearly in sight. My apartment building in New York celebrated the Governor's All Clear announcement by not requiring masks in the elevators. But only a few days later, there

were so many worried that now we are having to wear masks again in the elevator. Masks are good, but there of course is no way people can be separated by six feet in an elevator. So we dutifully wear our masks and try not to sneeze or cough. [Smile]

How about you? Are you fearful? No one wants to die of covid, and there are plenty of statistics that say vaccines are pretty much completely protective; out of over three hundred million who have been vaccinated, less than six thousand have succumbed to the virus (two chances in a hundred thousand); our chances of being hit

by a meteorite [look up] are about the same order of magnitude (one chance in 250,000). Now stop looking up. [Smile] ‘Why do we stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from us into heaven, will come in the same way as we saw him go into heaven.’

So we are living in a new creation now. The old is falling away and new is already upon us. If God is for us, who can be against us?

So take courage. Christ is near. Christ is here. We are Christ’s hands and feet and brains and hearts. Nothing in heaven or

earth can withstand Christ's power. Not a virus, not a terrorist, not anything. But our job is to stay focused, remain faithful, keep loving others as we love ourselves.

This moment is an end in itself, but this moment does not dictate how the next moment will play out. With Christ's help, miracles are always with us. Let us claim the miracles of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Description:

Jesus calls his followers to have no fear whatever trials and tribulations we are facing or may face. The storm will always be near, but we are to have no fear.

Tags:

Holy, Spirit, meteorite, Christ, hospital,
survivors, 9-11, St. Vincent, bishop, storm,
courage, fear, reconciliation, church, masks,
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