



Sunday
23rd June, 2024

Pentecost 5B

Totally at Sea – for the first time

Breaking Open the Word

**Pentecost 5
Liturgical Year B**



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Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



A tawny frogmouth on the exterior, St Stephen's,
Richmond, Victoria

READINGS

1 Samuel 17.57 - 18.5, 10-16
Psalm 133
2 Corinthians 6.1-13
Mark 4.35-41



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Summary



“

Ye of little faith...

”

This sermon explores the significance of the Sea of Galilee, Jonah's biblical story, disciples' challenges, and the pilgrimage concept. It emphasises the importance of faith, understanding, and connecting with God's presence, especially during difficult times. The preacher draws parallels between the struggles of the disciples and our journey in seeking God's peace and love. Overall, the sermon highlights the power of God to calm the storms in our lives and guide us on our pilgrimage towards Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

In the enlightening sermon “Totally at Sea, for the first time” from the “Pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God” series, he delves deeply into the significance of the Sea of Galilee and the trials faced by individuals grappling with life’s stormy waters. Drawing from his experiences of storm-ravaged coasts, it is easy to correlate the sea’s unpredictability and ferocity with life’s challenges. The sign of Jonah from the Bible could be seen as an allegory for resilience and spiritual rebirth.

Breathing new life into Jonah’s tale, he emphasizes his ordeal at sea—being swallowed by a monstrous creature, only to be spit out three days later. He encourages listeners to immerse themselves in the narrative, treating it as a story and an interactive lesson. Furthermore, he weaves the metaphor of the sea and its associated perils into the Gospel of Mark’s account of Jesus preaching from a boat on the shores of Galilee. This imagery highlights the dichotomy of fear and awe that the sea incites.

Reinforcing the point with Psalm 107, it is underscored how God’s wonders and works manifest even during life’s tumultuous moments. Obstacles encountered by the disciples, despite witnessing Jesus’s teachings and miracles firsthand, were a poignant part of the sermon.

Using the disciples’ struggle to fully comprehend Jesus’s works as a comparison, listeners are urged to truly comprehend the divine in everyday life and not overlook God’s presence out of scepticism or fear.

The sermon concludes with life as a pilgrimage, where individuals can experience immeasurable closeness with God. However, like traversing rough waters to reach the island of Iona, life’s journey is filled with trials. Yet through faith and prayer, we are assured of God’s abiding presence, guidance, and love.

To sum up, this sermon explored various facets of faith, from the perilous journey of Jonah to the disciples’ trials and the Sea of Galilee. It stresses the significance of faith-driven cognisance in recognising and connecting with God’s omnipresence amidst life’s turbulence.



Keywords

faith	tumult
perishing	peace



Contemplation

God will deliver	being afraid
bring of peace	trusting



Integration

connecting	I the Lord of sea
nothing will separate us	and sky
	peace



God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



Former Bishop of Durham, NT Wright, or as he is more affectionately known, Tom, made this observation regarding the Sea of Galilee.

It isn't only boats that are in danger on the Sea of Galilee. To this day, the car parks on the western shore have signs warning drivers of what happens in high winds. The sea can get very rough very quickly, and big waves can swamp cars parked on what looked like a safe beach. I have in my study a photograph of the lake, which I took from the top of the Golan Heights on a calm and sunny day; but when the wind suddenly gets up you wouldn't want to hang around outside with a camera. A boat on the lake suddenly gets tossed around like a child's toy. (N T Wright, Mark for Everyone, SPCK)

Growing up on the other side of the strait, it is something that I am only too familiar with, and to be honest, I need to say that there are those here among us whose experience of not only Straight between here and the Pallawa lands but the furiousness of East Coast lows down to Hobart that is, in all respects, awesome.

Oddly, today, I stand in my half-boat here by the edge of the lake, only days out from the Feast of Peter and Paul. Both were accustomed to travelling on the lake and the Mediterranean Sea. Paul was famously shipwrecked and, had he not met his untimely death in Rome, was heading to modern-day Spain to continue his evangelism. Convinced that nothing in all creation could ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, it would be another adventure.

Jesus was asked, "What sign will you give us?" to prove that he is the one who is to come. The only sign that Jesus said they were to receive was the sign of Jonah. Once found out for escaping God's will, Jonah was ceremoniously thrown from the boat in rough water on his long way from Nineveh. Swallowed by a mighty leviathan, a great beast of the water, he was to stay in the

depths of the beast for three days and three nights. In keeping with all the good stories and dramas in the Bible, he was vomited onto the shore and told to 'begin again.'

A footnote from me about Jonah: I used to find the reading of the texts from Jonah just as amusing as the text itself. Whether in the Cathedral in Naarm, St Paul's, or St David's in Nipaluna/Hobart, it was always read with reverence and Church of England niceties. This little book in the Bible is a comedy in four acts. The call, the refusal, the new beginning, and after a half-baked effort that even saw the cattle and sheep fast and put on sackcloth and ashes, Jonah gets more concerned about the worm that destroyed his shelter from the east wind. If you've never tried sharing this with children, try to get them to make the sound effects as the story is told.

Today, we pick up the story of Jesus, following on from the planting and realisation that the kingdom of God, which is a certainty, is already within us. What we are asked to do is to allow ourselves to discover and allow it to germinate into something outstanding. Like Jonah, there may be some false starts, and we are, thanks be to the love of God in Christ Jesus, assured that forgiven when genuine, we can begin again. Our creator, God, causes growth, as Jesus reminds us. In the parable of the sower, the nature of the soil, reception, environment, or shallowness of our hearts hinders growth. It is always God's desire for us to be aware that we are indeed so beautifully and wonderfully made, and our potential is the desire for us to achieve.

Sometimes, we look at those who are, as the prayerbook does not so charmingly express, 'afflicted in any way.' There is no need for you and me to explore which of the disorders of the parables afflict them. God desires us to seek justice, do mercy, and continue humbly on our pilgrimage. As the ears, mouth, hands and feet of the body of Christ,



it is in our love and compassion that we are called to enable all people to seek to live the quality of life to which they have.

A good friend of mine and former coach in the football world rang me on Friday. His decline into advanced Parkinson's certainly rang some bells for me, and I know that for each who is afflicted by the disease, the journey is similar but different. His loss of reliable mobility was fast, and now in his early 70s, he requires constant care. I recall after the death of his father, he never expected to see his half-sisters again.

In his hour of need, they both arranged for him to be close to them, near Torquay and in addition to visiting him most days, their grandchildren have come to know a person who is genuinely a great uncle. As we read recently, even if our outer nature is wasting away, we are being prepared for the reality of being in the presence of God. My friend is not overly religious other than being a lapsed Christmas and Easter, who, like me, went to a Catholic school. There, he was assured his lifestyle would send him to hell. "I'm not in hell", he confided. "I am at sea but in peace."

And there is where the disciples begin their journey of not getting it. All the parables and explanations so far have been given by Jesus on a boat on the shores of Galilee. Standing up so he could be seen and heard,



he taught them in parables, each hearing according to their level of understanding. He could explain the deeper meanings to those with him, but the teaching and proclamation on the shores of Galilee were given on a boat. To move even further into gentile territory, the disciples push off at night and journey to the other side. It is there that I bring to mind again the imagery that Bishop Tom Wright suggests.



When the wind suddenly gets up, you wouldn't want to hang around outside with a camera. A boat on the lake suddenly gets tossed around like a child's toy.

For those not of the region, for example, from the land-locked places such as Jerusalem and Nazareth, all that was evil originates in the water. Whilst water cleanses, restores, and enables, it also houses many other properties that are unhealthy for some.

Psalm 107 reminds us of the perils and tumult of being on the waves. This is known technically as "Onomatopoeia", meaning to "make names." There are simple ones, like 'woof', 'miaow', or my favourite one in Greek, 'probartan'. Sometimes, our poets manage to get it right. Indeed, the Psalmist in Psalm 107 had a great sense of drama.

23 They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters;

24 These see the works of the Lord and his
wonders in the deep.

25 For he commandeth, and raiseth the
stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves
thereof.

26 They mount up to the heaven, they go
down again to the depths: their soul is
melted because of trouble.

27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a
drunken man, and are at their wit's end.

28 Then they cry unto the Lord in their
trouble, and he bringeth them out of their
distresses.

29 He maketh the storm a calm, so that the
waves thereof are still.

30 Then are they glad because they be
quiet; so he bringeth them unto their
desired haven. (Authorised Version 1611)

If we pay attention, we see the story of today's gospel. He made the storm calm so that the waves became still, and they were glad...well, no, they were not pleased. Once, they were afraid; now, they're petrified!

Who is this that even the storms and waves obey him?

O, yea, of little faith. "Then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and he brings that out of their distress." The Psalmist tells them, yet they have forgotten in their tumult on the tempestuous sea.

So many more cliches, proverbs, analogies and metaphors could be expressed here. And sadly, many of us would know how to do this exceptionally well. It is akin to the Pharisees and scribes knowing their scriptures but somehow failing to see or hear what the words are saying. It is as if the seed God causes to grow is being stopped from reaching its full potential by failing to connect the mind with what the

rest of the senses perceive.

Don't get me wrong. I've been in 11 to 15 m swells on the various vessels that ply the great waters between here and God's chosen land, Tasmania. (I can say that where there is good, there is evil; where the Devil is, God prevails. Tassie Devil, Tasmanian God. I rest my case!

Now, you are distracted. Can you remember the story of the Psalms?

Over the next few weeks, we hear how Peter needed to be reminded of his responsibility, not only by our Lord but also by other messengers and dreams, to heed the word of God, not enshrine as marks in stones. We will hear more of the disciples failing to understand the manna from heaven because, to be honest, they're still at sea when Jesus proposes to walk on by them.

Happy are those who see and glimpse the kingdom of heaven.

I spoke of thin places, touching places, places where we perceive the presence of God. I told of Iona and the long trip to get there. I just remembered that I had to say this. There are many days of the year when getting onto Iona is impossible as the ferry cannot run due to the rough waters. It is a pilgrimage that is not always achieved by following a timeline. Life is also a pilgrimage that does indeed throw up challenges. But in faith, we are asked to remain constant in prayer.

The outcome may not always be what we desire, but we know this: God will always seek us out, call us by name, and contact us at home, the place prepared for those who love and believe in him, keep the word and excel in peace and love.

Icebreaker!



Have you ever been at sea or flying when things got a little 'rough'?



GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

How does the story of Jonah relate to the challenges faced by the disciples on the Sea of Galilee?

Context

The story of Jonah being thrown into turbulent waters and swallowed by a great beast, and Jesus referring to this event as a sign.

Application

Can you think of a time when you felt thrown into turbulent waters? How did your faith help you through this situation?

Question 2

What is the significance of Jesus teaching from a boat on the shores of Galilee?

Context

The Sea of Galilee symbolises danger and evil for those from landlocked regions.

Application

What places or situations have made you feel like you're facing danger or evil? How has your faith provided comfort and guidance during those times?

Context

The disciples having little faith and fear, even after Jesus calms the storm.

Application

Can you recall when you struggled to understand or fully trust God's works and teachings? What helped you grow in your faith and understanding?

Question 3

Why do the disciples struggle to grasp the meaning of Jesus' teachings and miracles, even though they have witnessed them?

Question 4

How does the concept of pilgrimage tie into the message of finding faith and understanding amid turbulent waters?

Context

The sermon discusses pilgrimage and the concept of God's presence in thin places where we can see it.



Application

What segments of your life's journey have felt like a pilgrimage, and how have those times deepened your connection with God?

Context

The sermon emphasises the power of God to calm the waves and bring people to their desired havens, showing His works and wonders even amid storms.

Application

Have you experienced God's works and wonders amid challenging situations? How have these experiences helped you grow in faith?

Question 5

In Psalm 107, those who go down to the sea in ships witness the works and wonders of the Lord. How does this relate to the disciples' experience on the Sea of Galilee?

Short Prayer Points

Bring to mind those who have asked for prayer requests.

- Thank God for the constant presence even during the storms of life.
- Ask God to help us recognize and accept new beginnings as Jonah did.
- Pray for strength and faith when facing challenging situations.
- Seek God's guidance to cultivate a heart that allows spiritual growth.



Brabarlung Totem
This is produced on
Gunaikurnai Land, and our
respects are paid to the First
Nations people everywhere.



Five Days at Sea

This five day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore themes of trust, transformation, and seeing with the eyes of the heart, as exemplified by the story of George McLeod and the Isle of Iona, as well as the journey of faith and redemption in real lives touched by God's grace.

Day 1

Psalm 107:23-30

Today's scripture reminds us of the perils faced by those who venture onto the stormy seas. Much like the disciples who were caught in a tempest, we too face storms in our own lives that leave us feeling tossed about and uncertain. This passage highlights God's power to calm the storms and bring us to our desired haven. Pastor's sermon underscores this truth by reminding us that even when we are afraid or overwhelmed, God's love and strength are unwavering.

In our journey, it is easy to forget the miracles God has performed in our lives. Just as the disciples struggled to recognize Jesus' calming of the storm as a manifestation of divine power, we too can overlook God's hand at work. Let us take time today to reflect on how God has carried us through our trials and trust in His continual presence.

What storms are you currently facing in your life?
How have you seen God's hand in calming previous storms you've experienced?
What does trusting in God's presence look like for you personally?
Pray for faith to recognize God's presence in the midst of life's storms.
Ask for peace and calm in areas of your life where you feel overwhelmed.

Day 2

Jonah 2:1-10

The story of Jonah is a powerful reflection on repentance, redemption, and starting anew. Just as Jonah was given a second chance after being in the belly of the whale, Pastor discusses how God's love and forgiveness are boundless, allowing us to begin again no matter our past. This resonates deeply as we consider that our failures and missteps do not define us. With genuine repentance, we are welcomed back into God's embrace.

Jonah's journey is a reminder that God's plans for us are steadfast. Even when we stray, He guides us back to our purpose. Today, let us contemplate the areas where we need to seek forgiveness and realign ourselves with God's will. Reflect on how His grace has offered you new beginnings and how you can extend that grace to others.

Where have you experienced a fresh start in your life through God's grace?
What areas of your life require repentance and a recommitment to God's path?
How can you show grace and forgiveness to those around you?
Pray for a heart of repentance and the strength to turn back to God.
Ask for guidance in extending God's grace to others in your life.

Day 3

Romans 8:38-39

Paul's assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus is a cornerstone of our faith. In his sermon, Pastor highlights the unwavering nature of God's love and how it remains with us through every trial and tribulation. This passage is a beacon of hope for those feeling isolated or overwhelmed by their circumstances. It reassures us that God's love is our constant, unbreakable support.

Paul's conviction encourages us to face life's challenges with courage and trust in God's unwavering presence. Today, let us meditate on this truth and allow it to fortify our faith. Recognize the profound love that covers us and commit to reflecting that love in our actions and relationships.

How does knowing God's love is inseparable impact your daily life?
What are some specific instances in your life where you felt God's unwavering love?
How can you share the message of God's inseparable love with others?
Pray for deepened awareness of God's love in your life.
Ask for boldness in sharing the assurance of God's love with others.

Day 4
Matthew 13:3-9

The parable of the sower and the seeds is a powerful illustration of how the conditions of our hearts impact our spiritual growth. Pastor's sermon reminds us that it is God's desire for us to flourish and grow in faith. However, the readiness and receptivity of our hearts play a crucial role in this process. Are we like the fertile soil that welcomes the seed, or are we hindered by shallowness and distractions?

As we reflect on this parable, consider the state of your heart and what might be preventing the seeds of God's word from taking root and flourishing. The parable encourages us to cultivate a heart that is open and receptive, ready to bear fruit for the glory of God.

What types of soil best represent your current spiritual state?
What can you do to cultivate a heart that is more receptive to God's word?
How has God's word taken root and grown in different areas of your life?
Pray for a heart that is fertile and receptive to God's word.
Ask for wisdom and strength to overcome obstacles that hinder spiritual growth.

Day 5
James 1:2-4

James encourages us to consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds because the testing of our faith produces perseverance. Pastor's sermon echoes this sentiment, reminding us that life's challenges are not without purpose. They shape our character, refine our faith, and bring us closer to God. Embracing trials with the mindset of growth and perseverance transforms our perspective on suffering.

As we conclude this devotional series, let us commit to viewing our challenges through the lens of faith. Recognize that every difficulty is an opportunity for growth and deeper trust in God. Persevere in your journey, holding onto the promise that God is at work within you, perfecting your faith.

How have past trials strengthened your faith and character?
What current struggles can you reframe as opportunities for growth?
How can perseverance in faith impact your relationship with God and others?
Pray for strength and perseverance in the face of trials.
Ask for a joyful heart that trusts in God's purposes.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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