

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

June 23, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Year B) 2024
Mark 4.35-41

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

From middle school until the end of college, I used to go deep-sea fishing about once a year. And I could spend a lot of time telling you fishing story after fishing story – I'm sure some would enjoy hearing them and most of you would not. Out of all the years that we went fishing in the Pamlico Sound, the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf Coast, and the Chesapeake Bay, I never once experienced a storm on those trips. Though we were never in a storm, we definitely had some choppy seas.

If you've ever been out in choppy waters, you might see folks a little queasy. Some of them leaning over the side of the boat and others making a dash for the head – the bathroom. Going to the bathroom when the boat is rocking is a terrible idea; because if you felt just a little sick when you went in, then you were a wreck soon after entering.

One of the boats we frequented was the Captain Stacy in Morehead City, NC. Every trip, even the smoothest of trips, had at least one person sick, usually the strong dude who was too tough to take his Dramamine. The movement of the boat is something that your body isn't use to, and your body reacts to this change of environment.

The truth is everyone is feeling fine at the dock, where everything is calm. But once you got out on the water and swells caused the boat to rock up and down and side to side, someone was leaning over the side praying for it all to end. Staying at the dock meant safety. Being out at sea meant adventure, learning, and growth. When going deep-sea fishing, who would ever want to stay tied to the dock?

In the evening, after Jesus has shared parable after parable, he commands his disciples to get into the boat and go across the water to the other side. Without rest and without food, Jesus gets into the boat with his disciples. There are other boats traveling with them. The boats are leaving the crowds behind. Jesus finds his way to the stern, the back of the boat, to take a nap. While he is sleeping, the disciples navigate to the other side of the water, where they will begin ministering to the Gentiles.

Somewhere along their journey, a great storm arises and abuses their boats. The storm was so severe that the waves were overtaking their boats. The disciples are in a panic. We know that at least four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen, so the fact that they are panicking tells us of the magnitude of this storm. In my mind's eye, these disciples must have felt like the poor soul who

thought they would be a tough guy and not take their motion sickness medicine before going out for a day of deep-sea fishing. I could picture them saying something like, “What did we get ourselves into? Things were much better back at the dock. I feel like I might die right here, surrounded by nothing but water.”

On dry land, while Jesus was teaching with parables, things were safe. Staying on the dock meant safety. While out on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples met chaos. Being out at sea meant adventure, learning, and growth. When it came to following Jesus, the disciples were probably wishing they had stayed tied to the dock.

Too many churches are tied to the docks, never wanting to set sail from the comfortable luxury liner they have built for themselves to enjoy. Churches have been known to become country clubs and/or places of entertainment, where you get the benefits of being a member, rather than being a community that reaches out to proclaim Christ to all the world through word and deed.

It feels nice to be in a place where you know what is going to happen; because it has happened the same way for the last fifty-some-odd years. You’ve been a part of those places and spaces that tell you “This is how we do it.” And truth is, you still find it being said around here. We too want to be tied to the dock where everything is comfortable. Because reaching out means chaos. Being out at sea means adventure, learning, and growth. When it comes to us Christians following Jesus, we are commanded to leave the dock – even when all we wish to do is stay where it is safe and comfortable.

While out at sea on our fishing excursions, we always had a blast. Even if we didn’t catch something, we still had an amazing trip. It was a time to bond, to hear other people’s stories, to practice tying knots, to learn about the boat and everyone on board. One of my favorite things, even fishing out of Fort Monroe on the Ocean Eagle, is getting to hear the stories of everyone else on the boat. While out at sea, though at times the waters could be choppy, it meant adventure, learning, and growth. The time out on the water sure did beat staying back at the dock.

Sometime after leaving the dock, the disciples face a storm that is overtaking their boat. Amidst the chaos, disciples begin to panic. While they are in a panic, Jesus is taking a nap at the back of the boat. They woke him up with a loud cry, “Teacher, do you not care that we are dying?” And Jesus springs to action, rebukes the wind while saying “Peace. Be still.” The raging storm turned to placidness. It was as if Jesus had turned off a valve.

Jesus asks them why they were afraid and why they lacked trust. I’m sure that most, if not all of us, would have been afraid in such a situation. Though Jesus had stopped the storm, I feel as if the disciples’ fear did not go away but rather changed from being afraid of the storm to being afraid of who Jesus really was – a man who had power enough for the wind and waters to listen to him. Of course, they obeyed; because this was the same voice of God that spoke and breathed them into existence.

For the Gospel according to Mark, this was the first of two boat trips with Jesus. Even on the second trip, they got caught up in another storm. Here, Jesus not only commands his followers to go out into the water, but Jesus was also commanding them to go out into the storm. There in

those storms, the disciples not only faced intense weather, but they also came head-to-head with adventure, learning, and growth. Though they were scared at what was happening and what was to come, we can see how their trips out to sea beat staying back at the dock.

Those of you who have been a part of the Gloria Dei community for a while, probably already know this; but as a refresher for some and as a learning moment for others, I want to talk about the different names for certain sections of the church building. When you come through the first set of double doors from the Atrium – that section is called the Narthex; if you grew up Baptist, they call it a vestibule. The Narthex is a gathering place, much like that of the front porch of your home. The section that is separated by the rails up front here, where we have the steps that lead up to the altar is known as the Chancel. In some traditions, the Chancel is separated by a gate or a screen. The Chancel for many traditions is where only the clergy can enter – of course, here at Gloria Dei that tends not to be the case. Our church is made in the shape of a cross and so the arms of the cross are called the transepts. We call ours the Choir Transept and the Baptismal Transept, because that is what takes place in those two spaces. Now the place where most of you sit, where our pews are placed, is called the Nave. You all have the habit of calling the whole worship space the Nave, but it is really only this one section here. Nave is a nautical term that means ship.

You are in a ship, and now you see that you are tied more to this gospel reading for today than you thought. You are the ship that is called to go out into the water and out into the storm. You are the church that Jesus is commanding away from comfort and into action. You can either remain a luxury liner tied up at the dock, or you can be a beat-up fishing boat that is pointing the world to Jesus – you can't be both. If you're ready to be the beat-up fishing boat that Christ is commanding us to be, can you sense the danger of the storm raging all around? Do you feel the raging winds demanding your transformation of heart, mind, soul, and strength that your very sense of identity as you've always known is about to be changed? Do you feel the water rushing over you as you remain faithful to God's call to do something bold for the sake of Jesus? Do you feel queasy as the glory days fade away and you don't know what is going to come next week when you gather once again with this family to worship God? Will you continue to praise God in the storm?

Where are we headed, ship? Where are we headed, people sitting in the nave? Where are we headed, people of Gloria Dei? Are we headed for the dock? Or, are we headed out to sea where there is adventure, learning, and growth? I sure hope that you choose to do what Jesus is commanding us to do, even if it means giving ourselves away and have nothing left for ourselves. Whatever it might be that Christ is calling us to, it has to be better than staying back at the dock.

You might be thinking, "What's the Good News, preacher?" The Good News is that no matter how bad things seem around us, Jesus is still on board; Jesus is still in control of the chaos; Jesus is still calling us, leading us, and loving us. The Good News is that Christ doesn't call this church to be a luxury liner, rather Christ is calling us to be a beat-up fishing boat.

Sisters and brothers, I do hope that you are ready for a wild adventure full of learning and growth. I can guarantee that with Christ on board this ship, the adventure is going to be way better than being tied to our dock of comfort. Haze gray and underway, Gloria Dei.