

## **Lectionary 19 A 2020**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

August 9, 2020

Matthew 14:22-33; I Kings 19:9-18

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

Dear Friends:

Tucson has all of these little micro climates. There was an article about it in the [Star](#) this week. Orange Grove Road is named for the orange groves that were once planted there because that is a place in Tucson that is less susceptible to freezing and frost. Something about the contours of the mountains and hills and washes. It's the place to grow oranges.

Well, on Saturday night, July 11, a monsoon storm hit this neighborhood, this micro climate. And it hit really, really hard. It was a dry windstorm. A micro burst, I guess. It was hurricane force winds. Right here on our church property, we had two trees destroyed. And two more trees that were so damaged that they were half-destroyed. The building was completely fine. It's built like a brick... church. A leaky brick church. Not so good with rain. But able to withstand the wind. There was quite a bit of damage to the landscape. And of course two miles away, nothing happened.

It's a wonderful coincidence that our lectionary assigns the story of Jesus and the storm to monsoon season, in two out of three summers. We have Matthew's version today, August 9. A year from now, we'll have John's version, on July 25, 2021. Monsoon season. The Sea of Galilee is in real life very much a place of micro climates and sudden thunderstorms. Something we have in common. And today we're going to talk about the storm. There's a difference when you call this story: "Jesus walks on water." Or when you call it: "Jesus calms the storm." Or when you call it: "Peter steps out of the boat with faith and with fear." Each of those is a different focus, a different lesson, a different sermon. Today we want to talk about the storm. So we're not so much talking about Jesus walking on water or Peter trying to walk on water. We're talking about the storm.

And while I would like to talk about precipitation, because if you're in a boat and the rain is coming down and visibility is down to, say, one hundred feet. You can't see the shore. Or the sun or the stars or the moon. You lose all sense of direction, which is not the case on land. So the people in this boat are afflicted by rain. At night. Which means being completely directionless. And that's scary. But let's not talk about the rain.

Let's talk about the wind. The wind is one of the two things that connects this gospel story with our first reading, the Elijah story. Both of them have a wind in them. Let me remind you. This is what it says about Elijah: *Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces.* There's no rain pouring down in that story. Just a wind. Just like we had *here* on July 11. Wind with no rain. Our micro burst, our monsoon event, was without rain. And the wind split the trees, and broke the trees in pieces. Not as much as the Old Testament wind splitting mountains and breaking rocks. But a great wind. A noisy and powerful and violent wind. Tornado force. As with Elijah.

And then in the gospel with Jesus, Matthew writes, "*The boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.*" The wind was against them. If they did know which way was the shoreline, the wind was blowing against them, blowing them further into the abyss and away from safety. The wind was against them. Maybe you've tired to walk in a wind so strong that you had to lean into it. But on water you can't brace against the wind. You're on a frictionless surface. You can't get a hold, you can't get purchase. "The wind was against them."

The people in both of our stories are good people who've done the Lord's work. And are tired. Elijah has done God's work, and is being pursued by his enemies. The disciples have done the work assigned to them by Jesus, and it has been hard. Jesus himself has been trying to find some quiet time since the execution of John the Baptist. And he can't get a break. That's the second connection between our first reading and our gospel reading. Everybody is run down.

Elijah and Jesus are placed side by side in the gospels. (Those of you who know the Transfiguration story know that.) "The wind was against them." Elijah experiences this whole sequence of natural disasters. The wind, the earthquake, the fire. It sounds like California, doesn't it? All that's missing is mudslides. "Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord... ..but the Lord was not in the wind." The Lord, it turns out, is in the silence. *The Lord was not in the wind.* The wind was against them. But the Lord was not in the wind.

Now, a lot of bad things are happening right now. I think the thing that is affecting me and you the most, and the nation the most, is the Coronavirus crisis. Which is not just one crisis, not just the health and mortality crisis. It's a collection of crises. Economic, cultural, medical, and political. But that's just coronavirus. Pick your bad news, pick your calamity. Deadlocked government. The death of George Floyd. The end of the postwar order that brought peace and prosperity for three generations. The global environmental crisis which we are speeding into like Thelma and Louise speeding

toward the end of the movie in their convertible. You've got your rain, your earthquake, your fire, your mudslides, your waves. There is plenty of misery and tragedy and malice to go around.

But the wind that is against you, the wind that is against us is fear and anger. There are several basic human emotions. And the most powerful emotions are fear and anger. They can hook you up to an fMRI and to an EEG and they can show the level of brain activity as you experience emotions. And anger and fear are *biologically* the most powerful emotions. The emotions we succumb to the most.

And two forces in our society— the politicians and the media— provoke fear and anger in order to manipulate you. To get you to watch their show. Or click on their social media. Or buy their service. Or vote for their candidate. We have a culture and an economy which award power and riches to those individuals and organizations that successfully manipulate us as consumers, as citizens, as voters. They are incentivized to maximize fear and anger because that's what humans respond to the most. We're wired that way. *That's* the wind. That's the wind that is against us. It's destructive and violent. It's noisy and turbulent. It pushes you where you don't want to go. And it's going to get stronger and stronger until November 3.

*“Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord... ..but the Lord was not in the wind.”* The Lord was in the silence. The sheer silence. “The still small voice” says the King James version. The hush, the quiet, the peace, the calm. That noisy wind is against you. But the Lord is not in the wind.

People say that our country is divided. And it is. But there are people and forces that gain power and wealth by keeping us divided. And a big part of the way that they gain power and wealth is by stoking anger and fear. That's the noisy wind. And they are going to blow that wind for as long as we allow it to control us. To push us where we don't want to go. The scientists say anger and fear are the most potent emotions in our biology. In the Gospel According to Star Wars, Yoda says it all comes down to fear. *“Fear is the path to the dark side...fear leads to anger... anger leads to hate... hate leads to suffering.”* President Franklin Roosevelt agreed: *“Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself— NAMELESS, UNREASONING, UNJUSTIFIED TERROR which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”* That's the wind that blows against us. No matter how hard we row. But the Lord is not in the wind.

Elijah found the Lord in the silence. The disciples discovered that the wind stopped as soon as Jesus got into the boat. I suggest that you find the place of stillness in your own life. If you can't find it, then make it. I would love it if instead of sixty people listening to our podcast each week, it would be ninety. I would love it if more people would pray. Or engage in Bible study. But if you can't reach the traditional places of spiritual stillness in the Christian religion, then find another way. Go walking at sunrise. Water your plants. Do a crossword puzzle. Listen to Mozart. Listen to Patsy Cline. Listen to Frank Sinatra. Turn off the damn television. You can watch ESPN. You can watch the remodeling shows. You can even watch the Simpsons. But if you are watching more than an hour of television news each day, your soul is in peril. You are sowing the wind, Hosea would say. And you are reaping the whirlwind.

Some of you are so upset that I said "damn" than you are going to tweet about it. And put it on Facebook. Go ahead. That just proves my point. Meanwhile, some of you are going to tune in next week to see if I cuss again. I'll be happy to cuss if I can get you to try church instead of spending two or three hours with TV news.

*"Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord... ...but the Lord was not in the wind."* God deliver us all from the storms, and bring us all safely to the shorelines of peace. Amen.