

Lectionary 12 B 2021

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

June 20, 2021

Mark 4:35-41

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

Dear Friends:

You may know that the Methodist Church was established by a man named John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley. The brothers are commemorated on our church calendar on March 2. Most Lutherans, including me, would think that Christmas isn't Christmas until we sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Most Lutherans, including me, would think that Easter isn't Easter until we sing "Jesus Christ is Risen Today!" Well, Charles Wesley wrote "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," and he wrote the last verse to "Jesus Christ is Risen Today!" as well as eight other hymns in our worship book.

Charles was the hymn-writer, while his brother John was more of the theologian and leader of the movement. John Wesley famously experienced a kind of conversion experience while listening to the words of Martin Luther. Luther would say that Paul's Letter to the Romans was the heart and the spark of what came to be known as the Reformation. Well, it was Luther's words about Romans that led to John Wesley's spiritual moment. A moment that Methodists refer to as John Wesley's "Aldersgate Experience," due to how it took place in London in a location on Aldersgate Street. In the United Methodist Church, Aldersgate Sunday is observed annually on a Sunday in late May in a tradition not entirely unlike the Lutheran annual observation of Reformation Sunday in late October.

But even though John Wesley and the Methodists put a great emphasis on his Aldersgate experience, and even though Lutherans proudly point out Martin Luther's influence on John Wesley more than 200 years beyond 95 Theses on the Wittenberg door, there is another factor in Wesley's background. An earlier adventure in his life involving the Moravians. John had been on a ship to America, to the British colony of Georgia. There were 80 English citizens on the ship. And 25 German Moravians. The Moravians are a branch of the Reformation that has run along a sort of parallel course to the Lutheran Reformation, but whereas the Lutheran churches were state churches, the Moravian Brethren were pietists who gathered in small communities. This journey to America was a four month voyage. Wesley recorded three storms at sea in his journey. He was very disturbed by his own fear of death. He had been impressed by the humility and easygoing nature of the Moravians, in contrast to the British. One Sunday evening at sea, there was the third Atlantic storm. John Wesley went to join the Moravians for evening prayer. And during the singing of the opening psalm, a giant wave broke over the ship. It broke the main sail into pieces. It flooded the compartments below decks. It appeared that the ship might very well be going under. The English were screaming and panicking. But those Moravians kept right on

singing the psalm that they were singing. And their worship continued despite the pandemonium all around them.

The storm ended at midnight, and the ship made it safely to Savannah. But for John Wesley, in his early thirties at the time, it made a huge impression. More than two years before his Aldersgate experience. Wesley was very impressed by Christian character. He never hesitated to praise it when he saw it. He never hesitated to criticize when he saw a lack of it. Even in himself. During a storm at sea that most would find terrifying, the Moravians sang on, worshiping their Lord.

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” is the question that the disciples ask Jesus in the midst of a terrifying storm on the Sea of Galilee. After all, Jesus is taking a nap. Does he not care that we are all going to drown? Jesus is at peace. He knows that the power of God is with them, and that they have nothing to fear. This comes very early in Mark’s gospel, when the disciples are still learning who Jesus is and what he is capable of. We the Church know Mark’s gospel, and we know a lot of things that the disciples at this point in the story do not know. So we, the readers and hearers of this story, can see the difference between the tranquility of faith and the panic of fear. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,”* Jesus would say elsewhere in the gospels. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* [John 14:27]

The Latin word for faith is *fide*. The Latin way of saying “with faith” is *con fide*. *Con fide*, or in English, “confidence.” Confidence is not arrogant or cocksure or foolish. Confidence, literally, is with faith. Storms can be terrifying. A young law student named Martin Luther was caught in a thunderstorm. He thought he was going to die. And he was on land! He prayed to Saint Anne and pledged that if she would protect him, he would become a monk. Storms are extreme circumstances. And in extreme circumstances, we reveal a side of ourselves that is not seen in normal times. They reveal the thing that interested John Wesley so intensely: Christian character. Or the lack of it.

Our task is not to be brave. Our task is to trust. Trust— faith, confidence— looks like boldness. But it is something different. Jesus said, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* [John 16:33, NIV] There are different kinds of storms. For the disciples, for Martin Luther, for John Wesley, storms could mean life or death. During this heat wave here in Arizona, during this first month of the Atlantic hurricane season, we know that weather can destroy and kill us, too. But apart from tropical storms and weather and climate, a storm is when things that we cannot control overwhelm us. Psalm 46 says “Be still, and know that I am God.” That’s all we have to know. That’s all we have to do. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* Amen.