

Jesus is asleep on the sea.

That may sound like our idea of an absolute joy.

It's summer

- vacations,

time on the lake,

dreaming of a cruise ship for some.

Anything to do with a boat

sounds pretty good

when temperatures are consistently in the 90's

and rarely get below 70 at night.

But there is also the danger of the sea.

God moved over the water in the beginning of creation.

God moved over the chaos.

I'm not sure what that means;

I still can't answer the question I had when I was a kid:

*what did God use to make the world?*

Or the question I had before that,

*Who made God?*

But the Bible tells us  
that the deep water,  
whether it's the water of creation,  
the water of the sea,  
or the water of baptism

- the Bible tells us  
that the deep water  
is a place of danger,  
a place of chaos,  
a place of change.

Wait!  
Baptism is dangerous?

Most certainly.

God loves us all.  
God saves us all.  
I believe this with all my heart  
and it is the only gospel I can preach.

But Baptism is that moment  
when we become a part of the household of God.

We were always loved,  
always saved.

Baptism is when we get hired  
to work for God.

Last week, I took a little oil  
and I made the sign of the cross on Burkley's forehead.

*You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism,  
and marked as Christ's own forever.*

That is a joy!  
That is a promise beyond anything we could hope for,  
an unbreakable promise of belonging.

It means we belong to God!

Also,  
it means we  
...belong  
...to God.

We no longer belong to ourselves.  
We belong to God,  
to the Body of Christ.  
We belong to each other.

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I wonder if this is what the disciples realized  
when Jesus calmed the storm,  
if that is why they were so afraid.

Jesus uses the words of exorcism  
to quell the raging wind  
and the crushing waves.

They have seen Jesus handle demons,  
but now they see him handle the water of chaos,  
the perilous darkness of the deep.

Our translation today is a poor one,  
*They were filled with great awe.*

It should say instead,  
*they feared a great fear.*

Why?  
Why be afraid,  
when you belong to one so powerful,  
when you belong to the one  
who can not only cast out demons,  
but also quell the raging deep?  
*Why fear a great fear?*

Because  
...they...belong  
...to God.

It is clear now:  
they have not hitched themselves to a minor prophet;  
they have not given up their lives to a revolutionary.

They have offered themselves,  
body and soul,  
to the living God.

I do not blame them.

*They feared a great fear  
and said to one another,  
“Who then is this,  
that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

I do not blame them one bit.

It is no easy thing to belong to the living God.

To belong to God

means we have a responsibility,  
to preach the good news,  
to push against the endless achievementism of our culture  
and proclaim the law of love,  
the good news of sabbath rest,  
the endless grace of God  
that will not let even one sheep in 99 be lost,  
that rejoices in one coin being found,  
that seeks after the most wayward and sinful  
of God’s children.

Jesus says again and again,  
*Don’t preach a small gospel.*

*You belong to the Living God.  
You can’t preach a small gospel  
when you belong to the one whom even the wind and the sea obey.*

But we do.

We get caught preaching a small gospel.

Worst of all,

we believe a small gospel,

a gospel that says you have to earn salvation,

a gospel that implies there is reward only for the righteous,

as if any of us are righteous.

Before I became an Episcopalian, and for many years after that,

I had my own way of preaching a small gospel.

I didn't want to be religious at all,

not surrounded by religions with easy answers,

not surrounded by religions that offered condemnation.

And so I didn't want to offer any condemnation,

not to myself, or anybody else.

If I could only minimize my sin, then I could minimize the condemnation.

But the truth is,

that is a small gospel.

Because the truth is,

we all sin.

We are all selfish,

and prideful,

and arrogant,

and fearful.

A small gospel says that these things don't really matter.

I'm ok.

You're ok.

God loves us because we aren't so bad.

The Gospel of the Living God says something a bit different.

The Gospel of the Living God says that we are often lost,  
and that God always seeks after us.

The Gospel of Jesus says that we are always finding ways to die,  
and that God is always making new ways to raise us.

The small Gospel says that the storm isn't so bad.

The Gospel,

The real Gospel,

The Gospel of Jesus,

The Gospel of the Living God,

says that no matter how perilous the waters,

the God of Creation will be in the boat with you,

calming the storm,

or perhaps calming you in the midst of the storm.

The Gospel says that God so loved the world,

and it's not much more complicated...

than that.