

# **First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**

## ***Life Together -- Through The Storms***

**Sunday, September 20, 2020**

**Rev. Emily Riley Campbell**

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Greeting, Announcements, and Opening Prayer**

Good morning. Welcome to worship here at First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. Today is Sunday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, and my name is the Reverend Emily Riley Campbell. I am so glad that you have joined us today for worship. I am delighted this morning to be leading worship along with the Reverend Mark Hovermale. Lisa Meyer is here as our guest soloist. I'm grateful to them as well as to Susan Underhill for her video skills in putting this together today.

Additionally, I want to give a huge thank you this morning to the volunteers within our church membership who have faithfully been working throughout the past week. Thanks especially goes to Wayne Krupin, Joe Thomas, and Rich Felcher. There really are eighteen volunteers who have been here tearing down ceilings, running wires, doing things outside with trees, and staining wood in the crafting of new ceilings. Now this is all in an attempt to update our alarm system, to run sprinklers throughout the building, to add new alarms, as well as video feed. This is also an attempt to bring up some of the aesthetics in the building, and to deal with some of the issues that have been waiting. We are blessed as a congregation to have so much talent here and I thank God for that, because each year they save our church tens of thousands of dollars in the work that they volunteer.

Friends, you can see our church remains very active even in this time when our church building remains closed. I just want to remind you that here within our church at this time we have begun a new sermon series focusing on "Life Together." Today, and what seems to be very appropriate, we're talking about life together in the midst of storms. Now long before the storms of this week happened we planned this worship service, but I cannot think of a more appropriate time, given all that's going on in Florida and Alabama and California, then for us to pause and focus our thoughts on where is God in the middle of all these storms? How is it that we can minister to each other in this time of need?

Let us quiet our hearts now before God as we turn to God in prayer. Would you all please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for calming the storms of our lives and world when we feel overwhelmed. Lord you are our peace. We thank you and praise you today for your voice which makes the winds cease. We praise you for your divine power, purposes and peace. Help us to trust in you. Help us to turn to you in our every experience of distress but forgive us, Lord, we pray, for turning to you only when life gives us no other choice. In our seasons of joy and bounty, guide us to gratitude. In our seasons of challenge may we be led to praise seeking and seeing your gracious provision. Lord, we are quick to complain and slow to profess our faith. Please send your Holy Spirit now to strengthen us in both faith and love. This we ask in the strong name of Jesus Christ, your son. Amen.

## **Rev. Mark Hovermale – Scripture Reading**

Luke 8:22-25 [New Revised Standard Version]

### **Jesus Calms a Storm**

<sup>22</sup> One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, <sup>23</sup> and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. <sup>24</sup> They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”

Isaiah 43:1-5 [New Revised Standard Version]

### **Restoration and Protection Promised**

**43** But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
<sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.  
<sup>5</sup> Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;

This is the word of the Lord. Amen

## **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Sermon**

Will you all please pray with me. Gracious God, thank you for guiding us through the storms of life. Help us here and now to place our faith and trust in you. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, I wonder if you caught the popular Facebook post that was going around last week that said, “When November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 hits, do not turn your clocks back, to end daylight savings, because none of us need even one extra hour of 2020!” It's not hard for us to pick up on the exhaustion and frustration felt by so many. It is only September, yet

how many of us are ready to be done with this year already. We are tired, fed up, overwhelmed, knowing that as much change as there has already been behind us, there is at least that much change ahead of us,

Schools continue to adapt and change, our nation changes during an election cycle, and the coming holidays will, of course, also have to change and be different this year, as well. It's exhausting trying to weather a storm. For some of us, the storm is not simply limited to a global pandemic, as bad as that is, For some of us, the reality is we are also, in addition to a global pandemic, facing a personal financial storm, or a relationship storm, or simply the storm of stress trying to juggle work and kids, kids at home doing school, or the storms of changes within our own life and working environment.

Where in the midst of all these storms do we go for help? We go to the one who is in the boat with us, who knows the power and pattern of every wave! We go to the one who knows the power and the pattern in duration of the wind. Following the pattern of the disciples, we recognize that when our own power and ability goes out, God's power always stays on. Remember, we should never be shy or reluctant to admit our need for God.

Keep in mind that the disciples we encounter in Luke, chapter 8, beginning at verse 8, were experienced fisherman. These men knew the sea of Galilee like the back of their hands. They were capable and they were so knowledgeable that Jesus felt comfortable sleeping in their presence, for Jesus would become tired just as we tire, and he trusted in their ability. He knew that it was safe for him to sleep in that boat and he knew that in their presence and in their experience he could rest. And yet these experienced, talented, capable fisherman found themselves overwhelmed by the severity of the storm. Their normal ways of coping were no longer working, and they found themselves growing in anxiousness and in worry. I love this story, because in four short verses in Luke chapter 8, in what I would call a great economy of words, Luke paints a very clear picture of these men in danger. It says in verse 24, they went to him, meaning to Jesus, and they woke him up shouting, "Master, master, we are perishing now."

It is a little dramatic, but isn't that how we feel when we feel overwhelmed? We feel like everything is crashing in on us and our very existence is threatened. Thinking they are drowning, the disciples cry out to Jesus for help. Through their actions, we are reminded today that when life gets too hard to stand on our own abilities we can kneel, and we can ask God for help. Ask for help remembering who it is that is in the boat with us. Remember the God who delivered the Israelites out of slavery and brought them safely through the Red Sea; *that* God is in the boat with us. Remember the God who defeated the entire Egyptian army, and then fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from heaven; *that* God is in our boat. The same God who was in the fire with Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego, the same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, *that* God is in the boat with us now! So it is that we fall on our knees praying for help, confident of the fact that God hears us.

Friends, clearly there's a point in each of our lives when we come to an awareness that we are facing something in life that is simply beyond our own skill or set of resources. It is then that we literally must throw ourselves on the mercy of Jesus Christ, because there's no one and nothing else that can save us or help us or bring us peace in the same way that Christ can. Who else but Christ can bring us through this global pandemic or through the storm of cancer or dementia? Who else but Christ can lead us through the storm of divorce or depression, the storm of grief or job loss? Who else but Christ can

lead us through a storm of substance abuse or racial unrest? We, in the face of every single storm in life, can either choose faith and trust in the abilities of God or we are left to the mercy of the storm and our own devices.

Henri Nouwen, the late Dutch priest, professor, and author, described the act of choosing faith or trusting God as flying on a trapeze. The skill in that act is not found in the one soaring through the air. The artistry and the grace of the trapeze artist is only possible because of the dependability of the catcher. This insight led Nouwen to a new understanding in his life of the way that God works. He began to understand through this analogy that we are only free to fly when we know that the catcher is fully prepared to grab us before we fall. Nouwen actually took this idea one step further. To fully engage this metaphor, Nouwen was fitted with a harness and ascended the trapeze himself and this 60s something, former Yale and Harvard professor giggled as he flew in the air. Like a child, after every descent, after falling into the net of safety, he would go up again. Knowing that he was completely safe allowed him to be free from any fear of heights or any fear of injury. What he found instead was child-like joy.

Friends, if we are to take risk and be free in the air, then we must fully depend on the power of the catcher. Faith is surrendering control of our present situation and trusting in the one who will not, and has never, let us fall. Thankfully, our God never changes in his commitment to be our catcher, our helper in times of trouble, even when it seems everything in the entire world is changing before our eyes. Our God remains a constant help. Our lives are totally dependent on his faithfulness.

The author of the book of Hebrews makes this fact clear. In Hebrews chapter 10, at verse 23, the writer of the book urges his readers to cling tenaciously to the hope we find in God:

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful”. He who promised is faithful. Even when we waver in our own faith to God, God remains faithful to us.

Today we recognize that turning to God will never keep us out of the storm. Storms will come whether we believe in God or not. But God's presence with us, our faith in God as our catcher, as the one in the boat with us prepared to help--*that* presence ensures that no matter what happens to us in this life we can be delivered safely into the arms of God.

So today I ask you, will we risk faith in the midst of this global pandemic, will we turn to God for help, and not just once but each and every single day as long as the waves continue to pound and the wind continues to blow? Will we recognize our need, and our dependence on God? Will we trust God to catch us and to give us the strength and peace that we need to get through each day of this current storm?

Friends, not only has God gifted us with the presence of Himself in the boat with us, God has also gifted us with the presence of each other. We are in this life together and that too is a gift and blessing from God. This is because it means that as we journey together through this pandemic, we are here to encourage one another, to pray for one another, to help one another where needed. At times we are the one being helped and at other times we are the one providing help. Yet this mutual dependence on God through this time of uncertainty and through this present storm leads us, as a church and as individuals within the church, to develop a deeper faith. I pray that God would bless us as we grow in faith through every storm in life. Amen.

## **Rev. Mark Hovermale — Prayers of the People, Benediction and Blessing**

Let us pray. Lord, we come before you as we travel through the storms of life, or at least know someone who is. We praise your name, that you promised to be with us in the storms and shelter us when they inevitably come. We pray before you so many requests and desires, hopes and concerns. We lift up our students and their teachers and all who work with them during these uncertain times. No matter what school looks like for each one, we pray your protection on all. We see in our country, strife abounds in so many ways. We pray for peace, for peace seekers and peacemakers. We know that the only answer for true peace in our country and our world is found in you and in you alone. We seek you and pray for that peace to come, not only in our country, but our world. We pray for our leaders from local and state to national. We pray for wisdom and kindness, justice and desire to seek you and your will for our nation. We pray for grace and love to encircle all our leaders in everything they say and do. We lift up those who are hurting today, those who have lost loved ones and cannot mourn the way they normally would because of the pandemic, and those who have lost jobs and homes, that you would provide for them. We pray that we as your church would do more than just pray but we would be your hands and feet to them. In this time, we bring before you our ministry partners, some of which are the Second Mile Center and pastor Ruth, the Hope Clinic, Colina, and our sister church in Malawi. We pray for protection and blessing on all of these, and more. We pray for those who serve you in the trenches during these difficult days.

We pray all of this and more in the name of your son Jesus, who taught us to pray saying,

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.

May you walk through the storms of life with Jesus right beside you.

And may the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be on you and yours, this day and forever more. Amen.