

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost A
Incarnation Lutheran Church**

TWO CONNECTORS

SOMETIMES WHEN I FIRST LOOK AT THE LECTIONARY TEXTS

ASSIGNED FOR THE DAY I WONDER HOW ON EARTH I CAN DO ANYTHING WITH THEM. AT OTHER TIMES, ALL FOUR TEXTS- READINGS, PSALM AND GOSPEL - ARE SO FULL OF PREACHING MATERIAL THAT I CAN HARDLY FIND A PLACE TO START. AND TODAY - WELL, TODAY - TWO OF MY FAVORITE BIBILICAL STORIES ARE BEFORE US. I ABSOLUTELY LOVE THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY OF ELIJAH HIDING IN THE CAVE AND - IN THE GOSPEL - THE STORY I'VE HEARD AND LOVED SINCE I WAS A LITTLE CHILD -JESUS AND PETER ON THE RAGING SEA OF GALILEE. SO - A DILEMMA! WHICH TEXT DO I SELECT? BUT THEN, I GOT TO THINKING - IS THERE A CONNECTOR BETWEEN THESE TWO STORIES THAT PERHAPS I'VE NOT SEEN BEFORE? IS THERE SOMETHING THERE THAT BINDS THESE TWO FAVORITE STORIES OF MINE TOGETHER? AND I THINK THERE IS....BUT FIRST - LOOK WITH ME AT EACH ONE.

TO GET THE FULL PICTURE OF THIS STORY OF ELIJAH HIDING IN THE CAVE, I NEED TO ADD SOME DETAILS. ELIJAH, YOU REMEMBER, IS A PROPHET OF GOD IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL. AND AT THIS TIME IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY, ISRAEL HAS NOT ONLY VIOLATED ITS COVENANT WITH GOD - ISRAEL HAS ABANDONED THE COVENANT. ISRAEL HAS TURNED TO OTHER GODS AHAB, ISRAEL'S KING, HAS MARRIED JEZEBEL, A PHOENICIAN PRINCESS WHO IS A WORSHIPPER OF BAAL AND AHAB HAS JOINED WITH HER

IN THAT PAGAN WORSHIP. AFTER A NUMBER OF ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN ELIJAH AND AHAB AND JEZEBEL, A STANDOFF COMES - A CHALLENGE BETWEEN ELIJAH, THE ONE PROPHET OF GOD AND 450 PROPHETS OF BAAL. A BULL WILL BE PREPARED FOR SACRIFICE AND PLACED ON AN ALTAR BUILT OF WOOD. THEN, PRAYERS WILL BE OFFERED, FIRST TO BAAL, AND THEN TO GOD, ASKING THAT A FIRE APPEAR AND THE ANIMAL SACRIFICED. THE PROPHETS OF BAAL PRAY AND PRAY - WITH NO RESULTS. ELIJAH PRAYS ONE LITTLE PRAYER - AND FIRE COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND THE BULL IS SACRIFICED TO ELIJAH'S GOD. IMMEDIATELY THEN, ELIJAH ORDERS THE EXECUTION OF THOSE 450 PROPHETS OF BAAL. KING AHAB TELLS JEZEBEL AND SHE VOWS TO TAKE ELIJAH'S LIFE. HE FLEES TO MT. HOREB AND HIDES IN A CAVE AND THAT'S WHERE WE FIND HIM IN TODAY'S TEXT - HIDING IN THAT CAVE, ALONE, FEARFUL THAT HE WILL BE FOUND AND KILLED. AND GOD PASSES BY - NOT IN THE WIND OR THE EARTHQUAKE OR FIRE - BUT IN THE SOUND OF SHEER SILENCE - AND ELIJAH IS GIVEN WHAT HE NEEDS TO COMPLETE THE MISSION GOD HAS FOR HIM TO DO.

IN THE GOSPEL TEXT - WE PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF LAST WEEK. THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 MEN PLUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN IS OVER. JESUS, STILL TIRED AND WEARY AND NEEDING THAT ALONE TIME WITH GOD, SENDS THE DISCIPLES IN A BOAT AHEAD OF HIM TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE WHILE HE HEADS UP THE MOUNTAIN TO PRAY. HOURS PASS. IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND WHILE JESUS IS PRAYING ALONE ON THAT MOUNTAIN SIDE, THE DISCIPLES ARE CAUGHT IN ONE OF THOSE

RAGING STORMS COMMON TO THE SEA OF GALILLE. THEIR BOAT IS BEING TOSSED AROUND LIKE A TOY. WAVES ARE SWELLING AND DUMPING WATER INTO THEIR BOAT – AND THEY ARE TOO FAR FROM SHORE TO MAKE IT BACK EVEN IF THEY COULD PREVAIL AGAINST THAT RAGING SEA. EVEN THESE SEASONED FISHERMEN ARE SCARED – AND WHEN THEY SEE JESUS WALKING TOWARD THEM ON THE WATER, THEY’RE NOT ONLY SCARED – THEY’RE TERRIFIED! THEY THINK HE IS A GHOST! JESUS SPEAKS. THEY RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE. AND PETER, EVER TEMPESTUOUS PETER, HEEDS JESUS’ BEACON TO COME. HE JUMPS OUT OF THE BOAT – AND ACTUALLY WALKS ON THE WATER – UNTIL – UNTIL HE IS DISTRACTED BY WHERE HE IS AND WHAT HE IS DOING. HIS FEAR NOT ONLY RETURNS; IT INTENSIFIES. HE STARTS TO SINK – CALLS OUT TO JESUS TO SAVE HIM. AND JESUS REACHES DOWN AND GRABS HIM, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME LAMENTING WITH SORROW, PETER’S LACK OF FAITH. BUT THEN, LOOK HOW THIS STORY ENDS. “WHEN THEY GOT BACK IN THE BOAT, THE WIND CEASED. AND THOSE IN THE BOAT WORSHIPPED JESUS, SAYING, “TRULY YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD.”

TWO POWERFUL STORIES – WITH ALL KINDS OF TEACHING AND PREACHING POINTS – ESPECIALLY THE GOSPEL STORY WITH THE BOAT AS THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH, OUR WILLINGNESS AS DISCIPLES TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT AND OUR NEED TO KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS AS WE DO SO. BUT I KEPT LOOKING FOR THE CONNECTORS. ARE THERE THINGS THAT CONNECT THESE TWO FAVORITE STORIES OF MINE? AND I FOUND TWO. ONE IS THE PRESENCE OF FEAR IN ELIJAH, IN PETER, IN ALL THE DISCIPLES. AND THE

OTHER – THE PRESENCE OF THE EVER –PRESENT GOD IN THE MIDST OF THAT FEAR – EVEN WHEN THEY COULDN'T RECOGNIZE GOD'S PRESENCE – UNTIL THE END OF THEIR STORIES UNFOLDS. ELIJAH SEES GOD IN THE SOUND OF SHEER SILENCE AND ALL THE DISCIPLES WORSHIP JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD IN THE STILLNESS THAT HAD COME TO THAT STORM-TOSSED BOAT.

AND ISN'T THAT STILL THE WAY OF LIFE FOR US AS WELL? DO WE NOT STILL HIDE IN CAVES? DO NOT THE STORMS STILL RAGE? AREN'T WE STILL AFRAID OF SO MANY THINGS? OUR NATION, OUR WORLD, IS AFRAID OF NUCLEAR WAR. MANY FEAR HUNGER OR THIRST IN THEIR OWN LANDS. MANY LIVE DAILY WITH THE FEAR OF GOVERNMENT OR MILITARY CORRUPTION. AND OF COURSE THERE ARE THE "ISMS" OF OUR SOCIETY - RACISM, SEXISM, AGISM, - LOOK AT ALL THESE "ISMS" THAT CREATE JUDGMENT ON THE PART OF SOME AND FEAR ON THE PART OF OTHERS. THOSE THINGS ARE EVER –PRESENT IN OUR LIVES.

AT A MORE PERSONAL LEVEL, FEAR ALSO INTERRUPTS OUR INNDIVIDUAL LIVES. THERE'S THE FEAR OF JOB SECURITY. WE ARE ALL TOO AWARE OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO NOW FEAR THEIR FUTURE AND THAT OF THEIR FAMILIES AS THEY FOUND THEMSELVES UNEXPECTEDLY UNEMPLOYED WHEN THE NUCLEAR PLANT PROJECTS WERE SHUT DOWN JUST LAST WEEK. THERE'S THE FEAR OF ILLNESS, FEAR OF THE RESULTS OF DIAGNOSTIC TESTS, FEAR OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS, FEAR OF GETTING ANOTHER YEAR OLDER...AND THE FEARS THAT ARE JUST INEVITABLE IN LIFE

- FEAR OF GOING TO A NEW SCHOOL, FEAR OF LEAVING HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME, FEAR OF HAVING A CHILD LEAVE HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME....

AND IN THE CHURCH - CHURCH IS NO DIFFERENT. CHURCH LEADERS FEAR OUR SOCIETY'S INDIFFERENCE TOWARD WORSHIP AND CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND STRUGGLE TO FIND ANSWERS TO THAT INDIFFERENCE. MANY CHURCHES FEAR THE LACK OF FINANCIAL MEANS TO DO THOSE THINGS THEY NEED TO BE DOING IN GOD'S NAME. SOME FEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT BEING FAITHFUL TO THEIR CALL TO BE DISCIPLES - TEACHERS, PREACHERS, HEALERS, CAREGIVERS, NURTURERS OF THE FAITH - AS GOD WOULD HAVE ALL OF US BE AND DO.

AND I THINK I WOULD BE AMISS IF I DIDN'T AT LEAST MENTION THE FEARS I AM HEARING RIGHT HERE AT INCARNATION AS WE APPROACH IN REAL TIME NOW OUR PARADIGM SHIFT FROM STAFF-LED MINISTRY TO A DISCIPLESHIP MODEL. I'M HEARING: THIS IS ALL NEW. I'M CONFUSED. WE DON'T HAVE EVERYTHING TIED DOWN. HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET ALL THIS DONE? I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO. NOTHING IS CLEAR. CONNECTIONS AREN'T BEING MADE. YES, WE'RE AFRAID IN HERE, TOO!

AND YOU KNOW WHAT FEAR DOES - IT SENDS US RUNNING BACK INTO A CAVE OR SINKING IN RAGING WATERS - UNTIL - UNTIL - WE REMEMBER THE SECOND CONNECTOR - THE PRESENCE OF THE EVER-PRESENT GOD IN THE MIST OF THE FEARS - OUTSIDE THE CAVE BECKONING US OUT SO WE CAN SEE GOD IN THE SOUND OF SHEER SILENCE - THE VOICE OF JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM - COME - AND THE HANDS OF JESUS GRABBING US AND

PULLING US SAFELY BACK INTO THE BOAT WHEN FEAR OVERTAKES AGAIN.

WE BELIEVE, WE TRUST THAT THE EVER-PRESENT GOD IS WITH US. LUTHER'S FAVORITE PSALM - PSALM 46 - ASSURES US OF THAT. "GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE. THEREFORE WE WILL NOT FEAR, THOUGH THE EARTH SHOULD CHANGE, THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE IN THE HEART OF THE SEA; THOUGH THE WATERS ROAR AND FOAM, THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE WITH ITS TUMULT - - FOR THE LORD OF HOSTS IS WITH US. THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR REFUGE. BE STILL, THE PSALMIST SAYS, BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.

AND HERE'S THE THING - THAT EVER-PRESENT GOD - SOMETIMES OUR GOD STILLS THE STORMS - AND SOMETIMES OUR GOD STILLS THE PERSON, THE NATION, THE CHURCH IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM. THAT'S GOD'S PROMISE - AND GOD ALWAYS KEEPS GOD'S PROMISES.