

Lectionary 12 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost Year B 2021
June 20, 2021

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

Storms are all around us. Most of us have a story of “the big one”—whether it was a thunderstorm, tornado, windstorm, blizzard, or ice storm, we like to share the stories of how we got through these big storms. I’ve heard a few of those stories from our community, and I certainly have a few of my own as well.

But these storms don’t need to be just weather-related to cause chaos in our lives. There are all kinds of storms around us—certainly the pandemic was a “big one” that has caused chaos in our lives. But we’ve also experienced political storms, one of “the big ones” being when rioters stormed the Capitol earlier this year. We’ve experienced storms in our church as people have gotten upset over various decisions throughout the years, perhaps one of “the big ones” was in 1926 when a group of members from our church disagreed with the church’s stance on welcoming Masons and Eastern Star members. Those that didn’t agree with our church’s stance on welcome left our congregation and built a new community across town. There have also been storms in our community and nation as people have fought for justice, equality, and freedom through the years.

And in addition to the storms around us, we also face storms within ourselves. Many of you know that I struggle with anxiety, and some of my anxiety attacks have felt like “the big one”. We can also face “the big one” when it comes to tough decisions around our relationships, jobs, retirement, and health. Certainly, some of these decisions can feel like “the big one.” But, storms, both within us and around us, are a regular part of our lives.

And they were for Jesus and the disciples, too. Today, we encounter Jesus and the disciples in the midst of one such weather-related storm. It must have been “the big one”, as some of the disciples were fishermen, and I’m sure they were used to being on the water in the middle of storms. In today’s storm, the waves were beating the boats, rocking them in the choppy water, and they were becoming so filled with water that the disciples were afraid the boats would sink.

And fear is certainly a common reaction to these big storms in our lives. There was a boy who was afraid of thunderstorms, as is somewhat common in young children. Whenever it would get stormy outside, he would watch the clouds, the rain, the thunder and lightning, and worry that there would be a tornado, or that lightning would strike his house, or that there was some other danger coming for him in the storm. He had heard that if the clouds looked green, there was likely to be a tornado coming, and so he was especially afraid when the clouds shifted from their normal gray color to gray with even the slightest green tint. He knew to count the time between seeing lightning and hearing thunder to determine how close the storm was, and as the storm approached, he became more and more certain that the lightning would strike only inches away from him. As he got a bit older, he even watched the weather alerts at the bottom of the tv screen, checking for tornado watches and warnings, and listening for the tornado sirens in his town.

So, when these storms arose, the boy would run to his parents—even wake them up if he had to, hoping that they would keep him safe from the storm. Certainly, he felt better around them, at least. And they would do their best to comfort him, as any loving parents would do. They told him that there was nothing to worry about, that the thunder was just the sound God bowling up in heaven, they told him of all the storms that they had experienced and they were

just fine. They even tried telling him that since their pets weren't afraid, there was nothing to worry about. All of this was never quite enough to quell the boy's fears completely, but it did make the storms a little bit easier for the boy.

But this went on for several years, and the parents were tired, and they really wanted their son to feel safe. So, one summer afternoon when it started to storm and the boy started to get anxious, the parents had an idea. They took the boy outside onto the porch in the middle of the rain. They were only a few inches outside the door, still under the eaves of the roof. The boy's father reached his hand out into the rain and said, "See, it's safe. There's nothing here to hurt you." His father stepped out into the storm, and looked up at the sky, and smiled. Then, he took his son by the hand and led him out away from the door and into the storm. And the boy, anxious at first, soon looked around him. He saw the way that the leaves almost seemed to have a different color in the storm's light. He watched as the trees swayed back and forth above him. He saw the amazing patterns that the lightning made across the sky—sometimes lighting up a whole cloud and sometimes sending a single bolt spidering through the sky.

The boy became fascinated by the storm—to the point where, when his father was soaking wet, and ready to go inside, the boy wanted to stay outside and keep watching. Eventually, he sat down on the step just outside the door. But he continued to watch the power and majesty of the thunderstorm. He began to think of what a wonder it is that water would fall from the sky and create such a beautiful world around him.

Venturing out into the storm, the boy's fears were calmed. He learned that most thunderstorms weren't dangerous, and that he had nothing to be afraid of. Later, as he continued to face storms, even if he became a little concerned, he was reminded of his father standing out in the rain with him and smiling, reminding him that there was nothing to fear.

Just as the boy looked to his father for comfort and safety, the disciples looked to Jesus when they were afraid during the storm on the boat. They trusted that Jesus could do something about the storm and keep them safe, and that's exactly what Jesus did. When the disciples woke Jesus and he saw their fear, Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea, saying, "Peace! Be still!" and the storm subsided.

And when Jesus asked the disciples why they were afraid, the answer was the same reason that the boy feared the storms: the disciples and the boy didn't realize that even in the storm, they were safe. Jesus, our comforter and protector is with us in all the storms of our lives. The storms won't always just go away, but Jesus promises to be with us and see us through our storms.

God is with us to comfort and protect us as we step out into the storms of our lives, like a father taking his son out onto the stoop to show him that he doesn't need to be afraid. In fact, as the boy grew older and moved on in his life, he liked to take his own son out to dance in the rain and splash in the puddles. He also learned to find comfort by sitting near a window and watching the rain come down outside. The rain reminded him of his father's love and comfort, and he knew that he had nothing to fear.

And so, we are never alone in the storms of our lives, whether they're physical or emotional. Christ is *always* with us. We don't need to fear. Instead, we trust that the one who is with us is the one who has the power to still the wind and the waves, and also has the power to carry us through. The one who is with us has laid the foundations of the earth, and has numbered its days ever since. God will always be with us to guide us, comfort us, and care for us, even as the storms rage around us. Thanks be to God. Amen.