

About two weeks ago at the Tony awards, theatre department director at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School received an award for her brave leadership during the massacre at the Florida high school and for her work with students following that terrible day, February 14. Melody Herzfeld hid sixty students in a closet during the massacre. Ms. Herzfeld received the Excellence in Theatre Education Award for that moment and for her work of encouraging students to work through the horrible events of February 14th through theater and the arts. You may have seen her students live or on YouTube singing “Seasons of Love” from the musical *Rent*.

I imagine many of you are familiar with the words:

Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes

How do you measure a year?

In daylights, sunsets, midnights, cups of coffee, inches, miles, laughter, in strife

How do you a measure a year?

How about love?

I think one social media post captured the moment:

“Their friends were murdered and their lives changed forever, yet they have the capacity to sing about LOVE. Love, not hate. That’s simply incredible.”

Yes. Simply incredible. A remarkable teacher guided these young people in the direction of love.

Two things came to mind when I heard about this teacher and students. First, I was immediately reminded of our neighbors at Central High School - Adam Ferbert, Central High School art teacher and his work with Central Art Club students. Adam offered students a way to

express their feelings about school violence through art. The students created the stunning Hands Against Gun Violence exhibit in the back of our church.

The other thing that comes to mind is Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's many messages and homilies on the power of God's love. We all now know about his sermon at the royal wedding! God's love underpins just about every aspect of creation and our lives – including the joyful occasion of weddings, and stormy, tearful, and turbulent times. If you go the page about Bishop Curry on the Episcopal web site, you will see in large font: **“If it's not about love, it's not about God.”**

Today's Gospel is about stormy weather - about Jesus and some disciples in a boat on the churning Sea of Galilee during a violent storm. And yes – it is about God's love.

Jesus has a had a busy day spent with crowds in the Galilee. He is in the area of Capernaum. It is late in the day, and likely dark outside. Jesus suggests to his disciples that they leave Capernaum and go to the other side. Let's take ourselves into this moment and consider this scene. It is one of the stories which I think we can all easily put ourselves in - climbing in that boat and having quite an unexpected adventure.

Picture the Sea. Maybe some of you have been to Galilee. From where the disciples were in Capernaum, it would have been a four to five mile boat ride across to the other side, a distance roughly from here at All Saints' to parts of Cranston.

Something else to know - the lake itself was surrounded by mountains. The people in the area, especially the fishing villages, would know that this sea of Galilee is subject to sudden and violent storms.

About the boat. Sometime in the 1980s, archeologists excavating the area uncovered a first century fishing boat hull in the Sea of Galilee. It was about 26 feet long 7 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. Twenty-six feet long is a good size boat, big enough to stretch out and take a nap. You can get a sense of the boat, the lake, the surrounding mountains, and the dark. (Sunset in the Galilee on June 19 was - 7:49 PM)!

Mark tells us that a great windstorm arose with waves beating into the boat. Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. That night, a storm was raging. What makes this reading so alive today is that there are many storms a raging across our globe today. Maybe not literally (although some of that too with destructive weather patterns) but storms of controversies and divisions, fragmentation, and random violence. There was risk crossing that lake over 2000 years ago. And today?

We share this boat. Jesus invited the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." Are not we, Jesus disciples, invited to do the same?

The sleeping Jesus appears to be oblivious to the stormy situation. I'm guessing that we all have felt that at some point. Maybe it seemed like you were sinking or under water for whatever reason, and whatever you did, God did not appear to be answering. Maybe you asked, "Why is this happening? Does anyway really care?" The disciples in the boat asked, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There is a psalm that expresses this common frustration or lament. It came up in Evening Prayer a few days ago - Psalm 77: Will the Lord cast me off forever and show favor to me no more? Has the loving-kindness of the Lord come to an end? Has God forgotten to be gracious and in anger withheld compassion?

But... Jesus is there... right there in that boat. Recall, it is Jesus who called his disciples to travel with him across the lake. Wordlessly, sharing first the tumult with the disciples, and then bringing peace and calm waters.

I don't think that this gospel is about being fearless. We all have fears. And I don't think the point is to shame us for all too human doubt in times of distress. This gospel story shores our faith, showing us Jesus' presence in the storms. We can know, we can be certain that in the troublesome crossings God crosses with us. In that common boat, we can joyfully claim the promises of God that takes us from place of paralysis, distress, and fear to the stillness of peace.

Jesus and the disciples made it across the Sea of Galilee. But they did more than just make it. Mark tells us as Jesus stilled the wind and waters, "And they were filled with great awe." Jesus was with the disciples in the water-logged and weather beaten boat, experiencing the same terrible storm, the same terrible waves, and the same terrible danger. In the stilling of the waters, in the silencing of the sea, Jesus reveals the powerful and loving presence of God. In the resulting calm, the disciples received the depths of God's caring and compassion. God's power is revealed in being right there with us, in the stilling of those waters. We are travelers in Christ, in the storms, the doubts, anxieties, and terrors.

This Gospel story asks something of us as well. As disciples who have been invited into the boat: Are we present to others in stormy crossings?

In his book *Crazy Christians: A Call to Follow Jesus*, Presiding Bishop Curry poses these questions about this gospel story: To what extent do we serve from the shore? Or are we in the boat in the midst of a storm? Bishop Curry says: "Being a Christian is not essentially about

joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream."

I have a favorite prayer about ending gun violence by the Rt. Rev. Stephen Lane. I find one line in this prayer especially powerful "Give us power to rise above our fear that nothing can be done." The disciples were given that power in the boat. Jesus' presence in our lives today gives us that power.

Invited by Jesus, in the name of God, with the power of Christ with us, we can stretch our hands of love to calm, to soothe, to rebuke, to care for, to awaken hope. To get us and others to the other side through the unexpected and sometimes violent storms.

"If it's not about love, it's not about God."