

June 20, 2021

Mark 4:35-41

“All Aboard! Time To Set Sail!”

Please pray with me: *O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.*

It's Father's Day, and it is the first day of summer. Are you ready to take a voyage with me? Remember now we can travel again. When Scott suggested I do this, I reacted like Phil Michelson winning the PGA championship. “It's slightly unnerving and exceptionally awesome,” Michelson said. Him winning at 50, me preaching my first sermon at 98. Don't worry; I won't let it go to my head.

I've got to tell you a story. In 1937, I was a teenager in Munich, a blue-eyed, blond-haired kid, waiting in the hotel lobby to see Adolf Hitler. The Führer, Devil Incarnate, walks over to the little tourists with kids and pats me on the head. Hair won't grow ever since.

I went to Colonial Barbershop downtown the other day to see my wonderful Lithuanian barber, Letta. Surely she can make things right. “You're a mess!” she greets me.

Which brings me to the Gospel text for the day, “Let us go to the other side,” Jesus says. I'm a sailor, and I suspect Jesus saw bad weather ahead, messy weather. Storms come up fast from the sea. Jesus wants to demonstrate the power of faith and his disciples. He will make things right.

Do you get my point? This glorious church is God's vessel, and we are the crew. We can be sinners here. We can be saints. We can be baptized anew in Jesus Christ. And how happy we are to make the voyage.

Let me pull out my logbook and recall some of the great ports of call that I treasured, made with this church. Sailing the Sea of Galilee with Guthrie Speers, eating St. Peter's fish, in communion with Jesus. Following in his footsteps of St. Paul, all over Turkey and Greece.

Standing on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in Martin Luther King's march for civil rights. Surely, we felt over our heads the long arc of the moral universe pointing towards justice, as Dr. King said.

My dear wife, Linda's memorial service where I tried to sing some of her favorite Gershwin tunes, “*There's a somebody I'm dying to see, I hope that she turns out to be, someone to watch over me,*” and the organ thunder to *Widor V*, the piece which Victoria plays so magnificently at Easter.

Going on mission trips – one in particular to inland Maine when we found unspeakable poverty, and we tried to rebuild, as well as we could - ramshackle houses. We slept in pup tents and got our meals at a local church.

Or, a magical moment when this whole space became Noah's Ark in Benjamin Britten's, “*Noye's Fludde,*” all the congregation, young and old, dressed as animals. I can just see Ted Foster, a big track star in New Canaan High School tearing around the Sanctuary carrying Alexandra, my granddaughter high above his head as a black raven. Alexandra is brown and from Pakistan. I want to tell you a little about Alexandra. She lives in Oakland, CA, with her partner, Reed, and is a therapist and a wonderful artist. Since our church is

honoring the LGBTQ community this month, I can proudly say that she is part of that community, and with God's grace, will give birth to a daughter in August.

In a letter to me just yesterday, she says, "Life isn't about avoiding the bruises, brokenness, and hate, but repairing them with love. "That's what I'll teach my child." I can only say, "Fly on, dearest Raven."

And now to Akira. Akira Okaya, a brilliant Japanese physicist who developed fiber optics. We were pals sitting over there in the choir. I was three years in the Pacific in World War II, a flier in the Army Air Corps, and Akira, in the Japanese Navy was trying to shoot me down. A General told us kids to hate the Japs, "Gas the bastards!" he said. Together in this space, arms linked, Akira and I shouted, "Alleluia" on Easter Sunday.

Here together, we really found peace and unbelievable friendship. And remember Hud Stoddard, one of our founding fathers, is the voice of God in the big review, "Mercy," we put on in honor of Guthrie's 35 years. Written by Melody and Ed Libonati, Ellen and Frank Sisson, David Brown, Sherry Tate, Bob Bergstrom, and others.

Here comes Marilyn Ballantine, our founding organist and choir director, sashaying down the center aisle in a red feather boa as Delilah. "*Delilah was a lady*" She was an organist coming from Union Seminary applying for a job. Victoria knows what I'm talking about.

In this church vessel, we can be serious and sad and silly, too. Laughter is so important. That's where our youth come in. Thank you, Courtney, for showing them the way.

But enough of looking back. You get the picture. Now it's time to take stock of our ship. We are all here for one another.

Did you hear that gasp of disbelief a few Sundays ago, when Scott announced that our beloved John Lanaway had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer? We sink or swim together on this ship.

How lucky we are to have Scott as the Skipper and Mary as First Officer. And I want to make a big shout out for Kim, who has endeared herself to this whole community.

Surely, we are just like the amazing men and women who founded our church. We want to learn. We want to be carried over to new heights of faith and action.

Cruelty and injustice are all around us. Foul and stormy weather maybe lie ahead. We'll be ready!

We can do more when we do it together. We have an amazing crew. And don't forget; we are all ministers here.

So, there we are. As Jesus urges us, "Let us go to the other side." All Aboard, it's time to set sail!

Thanks be to God.