

Sermon: June 21, 2009; St. John's, Roanoke:

The husband came home from work after a particularly rough day at work. He had never been so tired and bedraggled. As he entered the door, he said to his wife, "Honey, I've had a tough day. If you have any bad news, please keep it until later this evening."

"Okay," she said cheerfully, "No bad news. But I do have some good news to share with you. Two of our three children didn't break an arm today."

I don't know if you read about the true story of the mother who took her children to an exotic animal park in her new red Volkswagen beetle? She could not find a parking space, so she had to put her car in a remote area near the Ranger's station. When she returned some hours later she found the whole front end of the beetle smashed down. Furious, she asked a red-faced ranger standing nearby what had happened? Apologetically, the man assured her that the park would pay for the damage to her car. The cause of the damage was Millie the elephant, who took children for a ride around the park. Millie had spent several years in a circus and had been trained to sit on a red tub. And that's how the front end of the beetle had been smashed. Millie needed a rest break. The car would still run, so the woman gathered the necessary insurance information and sped on home. She was trying to pass a line of cars stalled at the scene of a wreck when she was stopped by a police officer that accused her of leaving the scene of an accident. She protested and pleaded that she had not been in an accident, but the officer kept pointing to the front end of her car. "Well, then, he said, "if you weren't in an accident, what happened to the front end of your car?"

"An elephant sat on it," she said.

Reaching into his pocket the officer brought out a small package and said, "Here, lady, I'd like you to breathe into this little balloon."

Storms are a part of life. Some are of a physical nature, like tornadoes, thunderstorms, earthquakes, or elephants sitting on your new red VW beetle. Others are of a spiritual nature. The Gospel for today tells the story of such storms. Both physical and spiritual storms are present in the story. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for such physical storms. The wind would sweep down from the high mountains surround the sea and the waves could become treacherous very quickly. As the disciples and Jesus were making their way to the other side of the lake, such a storm arose. Notice that Jesus was in the stern asleep. If this is simply a story about Jesus calming a physical storm, it is just

that, a story. A miracle, yes, but it has not much to say to our lives, our situation. But if we read the story in a symbolic sense, as well as a historical one, it is far more valuable to us. Notice that when the disciples realized the presence of Jesus with them the storm begins to be less frightening. Once they knew Jesus was with them and in charge, they felt a fearless peace in their hearts. To travel with Jesus was to travel in peace, even in a storm. That is one of the universal truths about Christian discipleship. Storms come. But in the midst of storms Jesus the Christ brings peace. That peace may come to us in several ways.

Jesus the Christ gives us peace in the storm of sorrow. When sorrow comes, as come it must, Jesus tells us of the glory of the life to come, while assuring us of the fact that sorrow can be redeemed in this life. He changes the darkness of death into the glory of life eternal. "I go to prepare a place for you." He tells us of the love of God. There is an old story about a gardener who had a favorite flower in the middle of the garden. He had cultivated it, fed it, picked bugs off it, watered it and had grown to love it. One day he came to the garden and found the flower gone. He was upset and angry. He vowed to find out who had done such a thing. In the midst of his complaining he ran into the lord of the manor and explained what had happened and he would get even with whoever had done this deed. "Hush your complaining," said the master, "I picked that flower to enjoy myself." In the storm of sorrow Jesus tells us that really never belonged to each other to begin with and that those we love have gone to be with God. We are given the assurance that we shall meet again those whom we love and who have gone from our physical sight for a while.

Jesus the Christ also gives us peace when life's problems confront us with doubts and tension and uncertainty. There may come times in our lives when we do not know what to do, when we stand at some crossroad and do not know which path to take. If we will turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, direct me with your will. What would you have me do?" Then, the way will become clearer and light will shine. The real tragedy, which I know from personal experience, it not that we don't know what to do, but that so often we do not humbly submit to his guidance. To ask for God's will and to submit to it is the way to genuine peace.

Jesus the Christ gives us peace in the storms of anxiety that are so much a part of contemporary life. The real enemy of peace is worry. Worry for ourselves, worry about the unknown future, worry about the ones we love seems to occupy a great deal of our thinking. Jesus spoke about and would have us know a Father whose hand holds us in pure love. No matter where we are, no matter where we go, and no matter where those we love may be God's love is there.

Yes, bad things do happen to good people and the innocent do suffer, but the storms can be calmed when we remember in whose loving hands we rest. The storms seem a bit less severe when we remember we can rest in the shadow under God's wing and that we are the apple of God's eye.

Some days our red VW gets smashed. But Jesus the Christ is present and it is his voice we may hear saying, "Peace! Be still!" He brings that peace in the storm of sorrow, when life's problems confront us with doubts, tension, and uncertainty, and when anxiety has us paralyzed. It is the peace of Christ that can help us join in singing one of the favorite hymns of my youth, "When peace, like a river attendeth our way, when sorrows like sea billows roll...Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul." The truth of those words is made even more poignant when we know that Matthew Spofford wrote them when he was on a boat that had taken him out to where a passenger ship had sunk; one that had his wife and daughter on board. Only the presence of the Risen Christ can make such grief bearable. Amen.