

“Welcome to the boat”

- Do you ever feel that you are in a large, upside down boat?
 - Take a minute to look up- even in a church with more contemporary church architecture you can still see it
 - In Latin, the word for boat is “navis”, the origin of the English words like navigate and navy ¹
 - And of course the church term nave.
 - The nave in a church is where the seats are.
 - Flip it upside down in your mind, and you get a big boat ferrying us all to salvation
 - Being guided by a rudder of prayer and sacrament
 - It makes perfect sense to me that many of our churches look like this
 - Some of the “big” stories found the Old Testament are about salvation through a boat and/or water
 - Jesus’ lived and taught in a society familiar with the fishing trade
 - No wonder Christians used a boat as one of the designs for a church- for this church
 - So in a very literal way, “Welcome to the boat”
- Boat imagery is all over the Bible
 - The first big one that comes to mind is of course Noah and the ark
 - Another, much smaller boat, also comes to mind
 - Moses’ life was saved when his mother, instead of handing him over to be killed, sent her infant son down the river in a basket to save him
 - A child separated from his mother thanks to Pharaoh’s policies...
 - We will come back to that in a minute
 - Finally, we remember Jonah, who was tossed overboard from a boat during a big storm
 - And promptly swallowed by a big fish.

¹ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_a_nave_in_a_church

- In each case, boats floated on the the sea that represented chaos and danger
- It is worth noting that the Babylonian goddess Tiamat was the goddess of the sea, the chaos monster ²
- This false god worshiped by a neighboring nation become the antithesis of what the ancient Israelites believed about YWHY
- And in many of their stories, YWHY salvation comes in spite of the chaotic, dangerous water, or even by taming it
- And in the gospel today, we also hear of Jesus also calming the storm, a chaotic and destructive force for the fishermen
- Within these stories swirl the themes of water, potential destruction, endurance, and salvation
- No wonder then that this image is so foundational that it is found within our very architecture and church lexicon
- Within these stories of watery chaos and salvation, a boat can be a place of safety
- And it can certainly be a place of risk, and of mission
- I recently heard a story about a passenger who boarded a boat for the first time ³
 - They were headed out on a short tour, maybe an architecture tour, or out to see an island
 - They were on their way, and this passenger became curious about how the boat worked, and what the different gauges were for
 - So the captain was answering his questions, trying to make it as simple as possible for this obvious novice
 - The passenger pointed to one particular readout, and asked what it was
 - The captain said, this is the depth gauge.
 - The passenger's eyes got really big, and he said, "shouldn't that always read zero?!"
- Let's think about that a moment- about being in God's boat
 - What does that mean?
 - The good news is that although there will be storms- and indeed bad storms that seem to have no good reason for happening

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat>

³ From "Covite", posted 11-26-2010, <http://forum.woodenboat.com/showthread.php?122913-Boat-Related-Humor>

- Ones that feel as though they threaten our very existence
- There is comfort today.
- Like Noah, and like Moses, it was the in the boat they found safety from the storms around them
- Jesus calms the storm in today's Gospel
- And God has given us a boat that will take us to safety through the storms that do come
- You're in it- welcome to the boat.
- And we do not sail along- Jesus is right there with us.
- And if we are doing it right, it can be a place of warmth, of belonging, of camaraderie, and a place of deep connection
- However, God's boats are a lot more than places of comfort- they are also a place of risk, and a place of mission
 - And we look no further than our Gospel reading this morning immediately before Jesus calms the storm
 - Jesus had just finished a long day of teaching, providing four parables about the Kingdom of God
 - And at the end of the day, Jesus leaves the crowd and goes across the lake, maybe to rest
 - A great windstorm came up- so bad it scared these professional fishermen
 - And the boat was in jeopardy of being swamped
 - Jesus must have been very tired, and a very sound sleeper- he was asleep in the stern on a cushion
 - They wake up Jesus, and in a frenzy accuse him of not caring if they live or die
 - "Teacher- do you not care that we are perishing?"
 - Jesus rebukes the wind and speaks to the sea- like a parent scolding child who knows better
 - "Peace. Be still"
 - It was the same verb he used to silence the demon in the synagogue ⁴
 - And once again the chaos ceased.
 - Then he turns to the disciples- and he asks them: "why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"
 - They were so impressed with that miracle that they did not hear the real question Jesus was asking them

⁴ http://web.me.com/lindyblack/Sermon_Fodder/Lectionary/Entries/2012/6/24_Pentecost_4B.html

- Even though the wind and sea raged on... Where was your faith?
- It reminds me that that God's redeeming work in creation is not yet complete
- The chaotic water is not yet tame.
- There is no guarantee of a smooth boat ride.
- It is interesting then to continue to consider this place a boat, both with its comfort and its dangers
 - This nave can be a calming place during those storms, where we find God's calming presence
 - It does not take much effort to look around this place and see the care you all have for each other
 - But being a nave is not just about comfort... it is also about mission, and that always includes risk.
 - This is a boat that helps not only those who are here, but seeks to help those who are not.
 - When I think about our mission as a boat, a nave, I cannot help but think about the lifeboats on the Titanic- most of you saw the movie
 - Designed to save people and carry them to safety, and some people did survive in lifeboats
 - While it is true there were not enough lifeboats to begin with, it is also true that the lifeboats left half full and did not come back to get people
 - They were too scared- too scared that if they went back they would not survive
 - Their fear, and their fondness of the calm kept them from helping others
 - Many naves decide to play it safe and calm, cutting off from the rest of the world, ministering only to those within
 - That is the exact opposite of what a nave is meant to be
 - Our mission is not only to be in this boat to keep ourselves safe, we are tasked with using this boat to help others
 - And that brings me to a very real and very current situation... I am sure you know where my mind is this week in this regard
 - I alluded to it earlier with Moses
 - It has been a painful, breathtaking week in our nation as we saw pictures of children being separated from their mothers
 - Heard the sobs of toddlers as they were held without parents, crying at the storm our nation had inflicted

- Then we witnessed how public policy was changed due to the outcry- and rightfully so!
- And to top it all off, we heard Scripture- our scripture- used to support these actions against immigrants and refugees- against children
- I cannot tell you what that did to me- pushed me over the edge
- I've spent a good part of my life studying and preaching scripture
- And I cannot stop thinking about all the many many verses in the Bible that run contrary to that idea
- Even Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of them, Moses' life is an object lesson for this very thing
 - BTW- Moses eventually grows up and returns to Egypt with God on his side to confront Pharaoh, and it is not pretty
- Paul talks about it in Hebrews- welcoming strangers is welcoming angels without knowing it
- And Jesus... whose parents fled to Egypt, became refugees, to save him from Herod
 - Grows up to tell us parables about Good Samaritans- good foreigners
 - Talks about letting the little children come to him unhindered, for heaven belongs to such as these
 - Says that what we do to the least of these, we do to him.
- But even deeper than that, that these people, parents and children, are children of God too... made in God's image like us
- And this is just the outrage of the week- there are so many people who need a good boat
- Some are hurting from physical needs, some are hurting from spiritual ones
- Some are far away, and others near by- and we can help
- All of these verses that push you and me, and this nave in which we worship and take shelter, out into God's mission
- Out to rescue people from the storms of life
- I will admit to you that when it comes to such topics I feel a bit like I'm preaching to the choir
- This parish values Outreach and has a heart for helping people like no other parish I've seen
- So what if we could spread that around a little- what if we could teach our state what means to care for people

- What if we could take what we have and do here, and help our nation live more open hearted, and open handed
- What if we could all start to see our boats, church and country alike, as more of a rescue vessel
 - And less of a battleship
- Because I'm convinced- when we claim to be children of God, made in God's image
- When we dare to climb in the boat with Jesus Jesus Christ and seek to follow him, things change
- Our life becomes more focused on helping and loving others, accepting risk, and being vulnerable,
 - And much less focused on our own safety and protection
- Being in the boat brings responsibility, along with that comfort and Christ's mission.
- So climb on in- this world needs all the rescue boats it can get.
- Let's be a nave.
- Welcome to the boat.

Amen.