



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Pastor Neal Buckaloo
Sunday, October 3rd, 2010
"Keep It Simple: Facing the Truth"

The children's message script was provided by the ELCA "Make It Simple" web resources.

Children's Sermon: Middle Sea

(Say aloud to the musician.) Before I begin, could I get a Middle C? (After note sounds) Thanks.

One day, after giving people food, making sick people better, and telling people God's truth, Jesus got into a boat. "Come on in," he told his friends, the disciples. So the disciples climbed in the boat. Be careful; it's kind of tippy. (Pretend to rock in a boat.) Hold on a second... (To musician) Could I get another Middle C? (After note sounds) Thanks.

Everyone in the boat? Great. The boat started off to the other side of the lake on gentle waves. Let's feel those gentle waves. (Rock with children, as though by waves.) In the middle of the night a horrible storm came up! (Pause and look terrified.) Hold on another second—you don't mind, do you? (To musician) Could I get another Middle C? (After note sounds) Thanks.

Where was I? Oh yeah, the storm raged on. The disciples awakened to ferocious winds and water pouring in. They tried to bail out the water with their hands, with their arms, with their feet, with their heads! (Pretend to bail.)

Now Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat. I mean, this guy could sleep! He slept through the waves; he slept through the wind; he slept through the water. But Jesus was God, of course, and God can even work in his sleep and God can definitely work in our sleep.

Did you know Jesus gave those disciples something before he even woke up? In the middle of the night, in the middle of the sea, he gave them "Middle Sea." (Cue musician for a note, then continue.) Middle C was a prayer. (Chant the following at that pitch.) Help us Jesus, we are drowning. Help us Jesus, we are drowning.

Jesus gave the disciples a prayer and they prayed it louder and louder. (Chant together, at Middle C pitch.) Help us Jesus, we are drowning. Help us Jesus, we are drowning.

Finally, Jesus woke up. He looked sort of grouchy. But he reached out his arms and shouted above the storm, "Peace. Be still." Instantly, there was silence. No more waves, no more wind. (Stop moving.)

Then Jesus looked at the storm inside the boat. He looked at the disciples' scared eyes, he looked at the way they were all wet, he looked at the way their hands gripped the sides of the boat. And Jesus gave them Middle Sea Part 2. (Cue musician for pitch again.) (Chant the following at that pitch.) Peace, be still. Peace, be still. (Invite the children to chant together this new prayer.)

"We're almost there," Jesus told them. "When we get out of the boat on the other side, we'll keep doing what we do. We'll feed people and heal people and help people. And we'll give something else after this trip. We'll give them Middle Sea for their storms." (Without seeking the pitch again, chant the entire prayer, inviting children to join you.) Help us Jesus, we are drowning. Peace, be still. Help us Jesus, we are drowning. Peace, be still.

You know, some people say that the church is like a boat. (Look up and around your worship space.) Some churches have a ceiling shaped like an upside down ark. We travel the seas in this boat. We journey with Jesus here. We go through some big storms outside of this boat and even sometimes inside this boat. And just like he promised, Jesus gives us Middle Sea here. (Chant the prayer, now inviting everyone in the congregation) Help us Jesus, we are drowning. Peace, be still. Amen!

Make It Simple: Facing the Truth

This sermon is adapted from a sermon written by a chaplain without appellation and made available by the ELCA "Make It Simple" web resources. Largely, the words are his or hers.

When is it that you were forced to face the truth? Was it when a relationship you thought was enduring ended? Was it when the promotion did not come and you realized that you were stuck in the position you were currently holding? Was when your job ended unexpectedly due to lay-off or the company closing? Was it when you or a loved one received the word confirming a severe or fatal medical condition?

A chaplain reflects, "Stocking caps. That's the first thing I noticed as I began working as a chaplain at a cancer center. Most of the patients were wearing stocking caps. The sight was so unusual that first day that I found myself both staring and trying not to stare.

Now, over a year later, after dozens of hours of conversations with cancer patients, I have learned to notice much more than stocking caps."

Many cancer patients tell the story of the day they were diagnosed. It's typically a tough and memorable day. It's a day when one must face the truth that life has changed, a day when the storm comes up on the lake. Next come more truth stories—the stories of all the truths patients have to face after they are diagnosed: doctor visits, insurance questions, painful conversations with loved ones and of course the times alone when one's own fears and strengths surface.

The chaplain continues, "Over the months of working there, though, I began to notice something. While no one ever asks for cancer—and it would be silly to romanticize this disease—cancer treatment seemed to clarify life for many, many patients. It began to occur to me that the world outside the cancer center appeared to be much more muddled than the world inside the cancer center."

"Little by little, I noticed the common thread in the patients: a goal that centered and connected them. When their life was on the line, they got clear about preserving life or finishing life with grace. Compared to most people I met outside of work, the patients seemed refreshingly "real." As I said, cancer can be a dread disease. But facing the truth of cancer seems to force many, many people to make life simpler by figuring out what life really means. When people are thrust into this involuntary simplicity, they see more clearly what's important. And that's often loved ones and God."

Be still. That's what Jesus told the storm in Mark's Gospel. That storm arrived out of nowhere, didn't it? And it changed the disciples' lives in a split second. It's hard to imagine how terrified they were, unless we've been there. Facing the truth that life can end or change—shivers run down our spines. Their faith mixing with their fears, the disciples woke Jesus. They knew, even in their terror, that Jesus was the source of life.

In this case, Jesus made it simple for the disciples: He saved them. He calmed the sea. Later Jesus died and rose again to save them and the rest of us as well. Who is this, that even the wind and waves obey him?

Dealing with a crisis like cancer or a job layoff or a flood instantly strips away the pretensions we hide behind. Everyone can see the truth of our need—even God—and what a relief that truth is! The truths come into focus—we need help to survive, God is with us.

Involuntary simplicity pushes truth into our face. It's sometimes an ugly truth—the truth of loss and pain. It's also a beautiful Truth—the truth that we never have to be alone. The waves are poised to drown us and we're in the boat with Jesus. Where else would we rather be? We can taste the salt water—from the waves and from our tears. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.

Making it simple by facing the truth is a huge issue for the church. We are the community of faith that people often turn to when involuntary simplicity strikes. And then there are so many truths on the line:

- The truth that the church is there to help others.
- The truth that we are at the mercy of some pretty hard unknowns.
- The truth that needs confessing—we are sinners and saints.
- The truth that God loves and saves us.

Our sacred stories of Jesus and the disciples allow us to see and pass on the truth. The Lord will fight for us. Even in the midst of programs, budgets, and a million distractions, especially in the midst of crises, the church needs to keep this message simple: God will

fight for us—and God will fight for others through us. We in the church need to hear that simple truth as much as we need to tell it. We need Jesus—this is our greatest asset as disciples.

Will an experience of involuntary simplicity lead to voluntary simplicity in our lives? Once the flood damage is mopped up, once the chemo bag is empty, once the new job becomes normal, once the congregation gains a cadre of new members—are we different and will we remain so?

God hopes so. There were people on the other side of that once-stormy lake—waiting for news of how those disciples got across. There are neighbors and strangers depending on our Christ-inspired generosity. We hope so. It is refreshing—no, revolutionary—to live life with a clearer, simpler appreciation of what life means. It is redemptive to keep our focus on Jesus, the one who saves us.

When we truly connect with Jesus and feel connected to others through thick and thin, we express our joy through generosity. We are one body, the body of Christ. And in this body, a body that can be ravaged by loss, sin, and crisis; a body that can be bathed by love and simple purpose, Jesus is among us. He can keep us focused. I think it's time to call on the One who really saves us, don't you? Amen