

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

“Looking back on the memory of the dance we shared ‘neath the stars above...” (“The Dance”; Garth Brooks, lyrics by Tony Arata). Those are the opening words from a well-known Garth Brooks song, “The Dance.” The song seems to be about a couple in a beautiful, loving relationship. The “dance” is the good times shared that hold so many fond memories as the songwriter looks back. Yet, amidst the dance are moments of great pain in which it seems the songwriter wonders if the dance was worth it as his (or her) beloved had to go. As hearers of the song and looking at the lyrics, we never truly learn what causes one partner to leave. Is it a painful separation? Is it an unexpected illness that leads to the death of his (or her) spouse? We just do not know, but clearly as the songwriter looks back, amidst the pain that he (or she) could have missed if he (or she) had never entered the relationship, he (or she) is able to conclude “I could have missed the pain, but I’d have had to miss the dance” as the refrain of the song highlights.

Looking back, it is easier to see so many things, including, God’s presence amidst those moments of pain, the storms of our lives. Like an unexpected phone call, someone picking up food and dropping it safely on your doorstep, the nurses, doctors, scientists, and first responders risking their lives responding to the call to love and serve the patients entrusted to their care suffering from a deadly virus, the creation of a vaccine so we can more safely gather today, new video and sound equipment assisting us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, God’s beloved people surprising you with a cake, words of support and encouragement, and love following 10 years of ministry,

and so many other ways God makes Godself known, revealing Jesus is always in the boat with us. The Spirit further equipping us to grow in our faith and trust of God.

Looking back also helps us to see many other moments in our lives. Like those moments in which trust was placed into our hands. You may not initially see it, but it was there. It may seem to start off small, like parents entrusting you to care for a pet. That trust blossoms over time. The trust to stay home alone or take the family cruiser out for the first time all by yourself. That trust often carries with it responsibility. Care for the pet. Adhering to rules when left alone: keep the door locked, only one or two friends can come over, no parties, etc., keep both hands on the steering wheel, no use of phones while driving, etc.

Most of the psalms can be grouped into various categories such as psalms of lament, thanksgiving, prayer, hope, liturgical song, and psalms of trust. The stilling of the storm is many things. Perhaps, more than anything, it is yet another epiphany of who Jesus is. A further opening into seeing Jesus is the Son of God, sent to earth to reveal the kingdom of God, and having the same power as the One who sent him. Power even to calm the wind and still the waves.

But it is also a story of great trust. Like the trust Jesus places in his Father to see him not only through this storm but also the storm of those whom he encounters, which cannot see who He is because he does not meet their expectations or he is a threat to the stable, comfortable and in-control lives they have worked so hard to build and maintain. Or the trust Jesus places in God to see him through the ultimate storm that awaits him at Calvary.

And then there is the trust, or lack of trust, the disciples have in Jesus. We often get fixated on this. What is wrong with these misfits? Why don't they get it? It's easy to sit back and judge, to point out the log in their eyes and fail first to see the log in our own eyes that at times causes us to ask the same question, "Who is this Jesus? Where are you Jesus? Are you asleep again leaving me all alone in the storm I find myself in? Don't you care Jesus?" But rather than look at their seeming lack of trust, let us look at the trust Jesus places in them.

Jesus is tired. He has been tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He has healed a man with an unclean spirit, a paralytic, a man with a withered hand and many others. He has cleansed a leper, called the disciples, begun to be challenged by the religious leaders about healing on the sabbath, and been called possessed, out of his mind, and had his identity, authority and mission questioned by many, including those closest to him in his hometown. And in Chapter 4, the crowds continue to grow and follow him. In fact, he had to climb into the boat along the shoreline just so he could escape them pressing in upon him so he can teach them using many parables. Surely, he must have been exhausted and needed his own time of peace and stillness. So, what is he to do? He falls fast asleep in the stern of the boat as his disciples and others alongside crossed the sea into foreign territory, the land of the gentiles.

It only seems plausible Jesus could do this because of the trust he had not only in his Father, but also the trust he had in the disciples to safely guide the boat across a sea they knew so well from having fished upon it their entire lives. These were gifted sailors Jesus called to his side. These were his friends he would love to the end. So, when this trust he has placed in them, the care he showed them, all he has taught them,

suddenly seems to fly out the window it is no wonder he gets a bit frustrated.

Yet, there is grace amidst this storm that has besieged their tiny vessel. There is grace even within this momentary lapse of trust and inability to grasp the One right before their very eyes. There is grace in this Jesus just as there was grace in the God of their ancestors when they set their sights elsewhere, failed to trust the God who time and time came to their aid rescuing them from sin, slavery, exile, and abandonment. Grace in the God who faithfully, lovingly, and patiently cared for God's people and upheld the covenantal promises God made with them.

The grace of Jesus made known in this story is that despite their lack of trust, their call to question his providential care for their well-being, Jesus never leaves the boat. He does not take the oars out of their hands. No, this band of misfits, he accepts just as they are – lack of trust, inability to see, and whatever else there may be. Perhaps, Jesus sees this as another opportunity to teach, to reveal, and to grow their faith, trust, and love for him, God, and one another. To strengthen them for the mission that lie ahead, to go with him to the land of the unknown, to partner with him as he feeds the multitudes, heals the sick, encounters and exercises dominion over evil spirits and forces, and ultimately journeys to the cross in which who Jesus is and just how much he does care for these brothers beside him, his sisters that stand beneath the cross and come to care for his broken body, and all people and all of creation that are so precious in God's eyes is most fully revealed and made known. But death does not blot out Jesus' trust in the disciples. His resurrection reveals his trust in them to continue to proclaim the good news, to sow seeds of faith, and to join with the one who ultimately will bring the kingdom to complete fruition.

Looking back, even when the storms have raged, our eyes have been closed to see and trust Jesus, to question his care for us, to wonder if the pain is simply too much to bear and he has abandoned us in it, thankfully the Spirit has sown in us the mustard sized seed of faith to see we were never alone. God was always at work. Jesus never left the boat. His care and concern for us never wavered. His trust in us never faltered. He accepts us just as we are. That trust he has in us, his unwavering, unconditional love, grace, and mercy and the presence of his Spirit is what equips us to move forward. Move beyond the pain. Move beyond the storms. Enter the peace, stillness, and spiritual closeness we have with him. Enables us to celebrate, cherish, and give thanks for the dance we have been invited and called into. The great dance of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The great dance of the chorus of witnesses that surround us. The great dance that is the love of Christ poured out upon us. Love that gives life. Love that saves. The great dance we are entrusted to share with one another and with the world.

The good news of this great dance moves us to proclaim whatever storm you might be encountering today, whatever pain you may be experiencing, dark night you are caught up in, whatever thought you have that no one cares, and you are all alone in your boat...hear this promise...you are never alone! You are loved! Jesus does care for you! Jesus accepts you just as you are! While perhaps your problem cannot be immediately solved or the storm that is battering your vessel may not come instantaneously find stable shores, there is always someone willing to listen, offer a hug, hold a hand, and remind you how precious and beloved you are in God's eyes. Jesus is always there to hear your prayer! Amen.