

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost  
Job 38:1-11  
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32  
2 Corinthians 6:1-13  
Mark 4:35-41

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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Grace and peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

Nestled between a string of parables and a series of miracles, Mark tells his version of the story often called “The Stilling of the Sea”. It’s a story that is familiar to us all – with its call to venture into the unknown, its iconic scenes featuring panic-stricken disciples journeying across raging waters, and a sleeping Savior who seems blissfully unaware of his surroundings. It’s a story that also echoes the well-known tale of Jonah – a fearful yet stubborn prophet, called by God to go to the other side of a stormy sea, to preach to a far-off people who were just as desperate to know God’s forgiveness, grace, and peace – as Jonah was himself. These are stories of God’s people responding as they so often do, with fear, trepidation and wonder, when God calls them to new ventures they never would have considered had they been left to their own devices.

So maybe, it is no surprise at all that Mark chooses to link these strong narratives together for us to hear this morning in the writing of his gospel. Stories inviting us to share in the ways discipleship links us to God as followers of Christ – to keep faith in the face of fear, to listen for God in times of disbelief, and to hold on to hope when the world seems bleak. These are all things we seem to need to hear more and more these days. To keep the faith, to hold on to hope, and to listen for God – especially when the world seems to be such a troubled place.

And as people of faith, we have been doing our best to do just that - by responding to God’s call to cross boundaries and borders that may have kept us from truly being in relationship with our neighbors. Trusting that God is at work with and among us to bring reconciliation and restoration, as we grow and learn with and among those in our community.

This morning I’d like to take some time to uplift three ways I think we have been invited to keep the faith, to hold on to hope, and to listen to God as a family of faith here at Holy Spirit – as we cross borders and boundaries to spread the love of God from this place. As I do, I’ll invite you to join in, thinking of the ways you know we have joined in this work over our years as a community – adding your own ideas in our place of welcome following service today.

The first story I’d like to share is about keeping the faith.

This last week as news broke that for the first time in their 26-year history, our neighbors at the Islamic Society in Edson faced a shocking arson attack during their time of evening prayer on June 16<sup>th</sup>. While thankfully no one was physically harmed in this attack, members of this faith community have been left with the emotional and spiritual trauma of considering if they are safe to worship, live, and be in community with their neighbours.



Upon hearing about this story, one of our members contacted me to see how we might reach out to show our love and support of this community following this terrifying event. After some discussion we decided that sending a tangible sign of our care would be best, and so this morning you will find a card and a letter in our place of welcome, which we will be sending on behalf of Holy Spirit to show our solidarity with this community of faith.

An act that echoes a recent decision at our Synodical Convention in Camrose just last week, which encourages our Synod and its congregations to clearly and unequivocally state our commitment to lift up the dignity and worth of all persons regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation. Especially calling on the church and our Bishop to reach out to persons and groups who are targets of hate or violence - with support and solidarity.

While the action of letter writing may seem small in the face of fear and pain, it not only tangibly shows our solidarity with those who are being oppressed but also echoes the call of our National Bishop Susan Johnson – who commends us to stand in solidarity with those who are in need.

Which leads me to the second story about holding on to hope.

This past week, on behalf of the ELCIC, Bishop Susan wrote an open letter to the church, and our federal government, uplifting the importance of World Refugee Day – a movement at the heart of the Lutheran church throughout the world. After the turn of the Second World War, one in six Lutherans were refugees; As a result, our churches welcomed and were filled with refugee families from Lutheran nations across Europe. Some of these stories are even held by members of our own congregation who came to Canada under these very circumstances.



So I'd like to share a piece of the letter written by our national Bishop with you this morning:

### **A letter to the church on World Refugee Day 2018**

*Dear friends,*

*Today I am in Waterloo, Ont. taking part in Canadian Lutheran World Relief's (CLWR) World Refugee Day Prayer Breakfast.*

*I am proud of the work being done in this area by our church and by CLWR. During the Reformation Challenge, we sponsored more than 500 refugees, offering generous support and friendship as these people settled in Canada.*

*And yet, I am aware of our society's sometimes weak commitment to being a welcoming and safe community. Particularly distressing are stories emerging from the United States*

*of intentional policy choices to separate families and criminally prosecuting people as they cross the border seeking asylum.*

*I urge you to read and share the letter I have written to Canada's Prime Minister ([elcic.ca/documents/201806worldrefugeeday.pdf](http://elcic.ca/documents/201806worldrefugeeday.pdf)) imploring him to uphold the rights of refugees in Canada, in North America and around the world. In the letter, I call on the Prime Minister to use whatever influence he has to ask the U.S. Government to reverse these policies that deliberately violate human rights.*

*I also urge you to pray for our sister church, the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](http://elca.org/News-and-Events/7935), and give thanks for their continued witness and support of refugees ([elca.org/News-and-Events/7935](http://elca.org/News-and-Events/7935)).*

*On this World Refugee Day, I invite you to renew your commitment to upholding the rights of refugees, to learn and raise awareness about refugee issues, and to pray for peace, justice and safety for all people.*

*Each new dawn is a reminder that light arises from the darkness, providing an opportunity to follow Christ on the journey of living by grace. I am reminded of the parable of the great banquet, Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled (Luke 14:15–24). Our calling is not to separate families; our calling is to invite everyone to the feast, so that all may be fed, all may be welcome, the house may be filled, and God's community may be complete.*

*Yours in Christ,  
The Rev. Susan C. Johnson  
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*

As our own community of faith prepares to welcome two refugee families in the coming weeks, we can be encouraged by our National Bishop's call, actively joining the work of the global Lutheran community to welcome, support, and care for refugees as they begin life again in a new country — a venture that is not new to us over our years, but one that will call us once again to cross the boundaries of our languages and cultures to build relationships in new and life-giving ways. An act of hope which imagines a day without refugees.

The last story I would like to share this morning is about listening for God.

This past week also marked the celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day across our nation. While I was unable to take in the ceremonies and celebrations, I was able to hear a presentation on CBC about the purpose of the day's gatherings as I worked and traveled throughout the city. I was immediately struck by how little I had known about this celebration or the history and achievements it holds up for us as a community of people on Treaty 6 Territory.



As I listened to the radio program, I learned one of the event's hashtags on social media this year was started by APTN — or the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network — asking Canadians to name their indigenous hero (#WholsYourIndigenousHero).

And I am embarrassed to admit that when that question hit my ears I couldn't come up with more than one name on the spot. I turned to Google, which is a great place to start a learning journey as long as you check your sources. After only a few moments of searching I quickly realized that I would have a hard time choosing just one indigenous hero because there were so many amazing people to choose from.

People like Hubert Skye, who protected and revitalized the language and culture of his community when he was hired as a teacher in a Moose Factory residential school. Actively choosing to break the government's oppressive rules by secretly teaching children the *Cayuga* language. He spent 37 years teaching in schools throughout Ontario, and a lifetime preserving the *Oh gweh hon weh* language.



People like Maria Campbell who is a pioneer of modern Metis literature - best known for her pivotal work, *Half-Breed* – about straddling the worlds of her identities. As a scholar, she has focused on preserving the oral history of cultural practices for her community.



Or people like Alanis Obomsawin, who worked hard to advance indigenous realities in mainstream Canada through the power of the film industry. At an early age Alanis worked to preserve stories to educate Canadians about the inequities facing Indigenous peoples. She has made more than 30 films with the National Film Board over her lengthy career. Now in her 80s, she is still making films.



The truth of the matter is, while there are so many indigenous heroes I could name - I was blinded to the incredible wealth of knowledge, culture, and history of peoples I have lived alongside my whole life. And I began to feel the call of God to cross and confront the barriers that had kept me from truly knowing this amazing community in the first place.

Barriers like my own privilege, as a long established immigrant in this land. Privilege that kept me from intentionally learning alongside members of indigenous communities about their rich history here on Turtle Island. Barriers like my own fear – fear that I would do or say the wrong thing and be labelled as just another settler unaware of their own innate prejudices and racism. Barriers that have helped to support the painful ways Indigenous People's cultures, languages, and histories have been erased and appropriated across Canada. And even barriers that I have yet to fully come to understand. Barriers that blinded me – much like the disciples in the heart of the storm. Causing them to forget in the midst of their fears and disbelief that God was still with them on their journey and had promised them they would come to rest on the other side of the shore.

So as I listened to the radio that day – I came to realize that staying behind these barriers was no longer an option for me as a person of faith. I had to trust that Christ would still and calm my fears just like he did the sea. Transforming barriers into bridges of vulnerability that could take me across the sea.

When our barriers and boundaries come to be seen this way, our story is not just one of many miracle-over-nature stories, our story becomes one founded in the stilling hope of Christ: trusting that in the midst of this world's greatest storms, troubles, and pains that we have not been abandoned by God, but sent out in faith, hope, and love – listening for the ways we can join in the restoration and reconciliation of all of God's good creation.

And as Lutherans and people of faith, we have been doing our best to do just that - by responding to God's call to cross boundaries and borders that may have kept us from truly being in relationship with our neighbors in the past. Trusting that God is at work in and through us to bring new life as we grow and learn with and among those in our community and world.

Through these narratives God is inviting us to detach ourselves from our familiar shores, turning ourselves toward those distant places and peoples who seem to be much different than ourselves – trusting that God will show us the way to build relationships in faith, bridges in hope, and share in reconciling love that will bring healing within this world.

May this be so among us - *Amen*.