

THURSDAY

Read: Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, calling people to turn around, change their hearts and lives, and follow him. He started teaching about this Kingdom, talking about little seeds that grow big, and about abundant harvests.

When they experienced a storm, Jesus offered peace and the storm was still. What storms are you facing? What does the peace of Christ look like in your life and your world? Life can be hard, life can be stormy. Being a Christian doesn't mean all storms instantly go away, but we do have the promise that God is with us, with a peaceful presence.

If you're in a stormy time today, take a moment and remember that God in Jesus Christ promises to be with us. Remember that several times Jesus said "Peace be with you." Look around and if you see other people going through rough times think about how might you be a peaceful presence in a storm.

Prayer: God we thank you that in Jesus Christ you came to be with us in the storms of life, and that you offer us peace. Help us to welcome and share this peace. Amen.

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VACATION BIBLE CAMP DEVOTIONAL

JUNE 12 - 15



COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BETHANY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
AND MADISON MENNONITE CHURCH

MONDAY

Read: Genesis 7: 1-5

"The Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark with your whole household, because among this generation I've seen that you are a moral man. From every clean animal, take seven pairs, a male and his mate; and from every unclean animal, take one pair, a male and his mate; and from the birds in the sky as well, take seven pairs, male and female, so that their offspring will survive throughout the earth. In seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. I will wipe off from the fertile land every living thing that I have made." Noah did everything the Lord commanded him.

This is probably the longest scripture passage chosen for VBC (Genesis 6-9) and perhaps the most difficult to understand. As children we might hear and picture the story of cute animals filling a boat and a happy Noah and family safe and sound inside this adorable ship. However, as adults the story most likely brings more questions than answers.

The unsettling part of the story is the fate of those not on the ark. When I read a story like this I try to discern the meaning for the time it was written and the meaning today. What might we learn from this story? I believe this story is meant to teach us about God's love and care. It's meant to teach us about kindness and compassion. Rather than focusing on the wrath of God we can look at the story through the eyes of compassion.

For the original audience, when bad things happened the reasoning was that the gods or God must be angry. But in this story God has compassion and provides a place of safety and refuge. Violence is still prevalent in our world and so might this story be challenging us to create places of safety and refuge.

Does the church provide a place of safety and refuge? How can I be a place of safety and refuge? How can I help others to know they are worthy of refuge?

Prayer: God of compassion, help me to see the world as you do, with love and compassion and room for all creatures.

TUESDAY

Read: Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Moses is the one who led the people out of slavery. In the story of his birth, we need to remember the horror of day: Pharaoh had ordered all male babies to be killed. The children at VBC will not be focusing on this aspect of the story but we adults shouldn't gloss over it. World history and our world today has too much violence and brutality. God is involved in the ongoing process of saving people from slavery, oppression, and death.

We also need to acknowledge the brave and clever actions of Moses' sister (Miriam) who took initiative in this time of violence and brutality to do good, which reunited Moses with his mother. In challenging times, family ties can be strained. How might you reconnect or strengthen ties in your own family?

Do you know anyone with young children right now? How might you be able to support them? Or how could you support an organization that works with children?

Prayer: God thank you for the courage of Miriam and the leadership of Moses, who came out of the water to lead your people to the Promised Land, to a new hope. I pray for people living in poverty and oppressive conditions right now. Grant us courage and wisdom for whatever we might face today. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Read: from John 4:7-15

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.

The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

During VBC this story is told with felt pieces. In describing the division between Jews and Samaritans an image of a broken heart is displayed. The first time I saw that image it took my breath away. What a perfect reflection of what happens when God's children are divided. We break God's heart. Jesus came to mend broken hearts. Jesus came to heal the divisions, to break down walls and stereotypes.

For the early Christians this is a shocking story on many levels. Just traveling through Samaria is shocking. The division between Jews and Samaritans was so great that they would travel miles out of their way to avoid one another. Then Jesus does more shocking things by talking to a Samaritan, who is a woman, and who is alone! All these are forbidden during this time. Jesus cares nothing about those rules. What Jesus cares about is love. He shows love and kindness to a fellow human being. Jesus offers the Samaritan woman more than water, he sees her as worthy of his time and attention. He tells her that the divisions are ending and God doesn't belong to one tribe, God's love is available to all people. The pieces of the broken heart are brought together in Jesus' life and love.

Reflect: When have I broken God's heart? What might I do to heal the divisions in our world? What might our church do to heal divisions in our world?

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for Jesus and the love and kindness he shares. Thank you for mending our broken hearts. Thank you for reminding us that your love is available to all people. May we love one another as you have loved us. Amen.