



**A Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost
June 23, 2024**



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee BY Rembrandt.
Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston on March 18, 1990.

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[Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

1 Samuel 17: 1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49, Mark 4:35-41, Hymn 608

In the boat with Jesus

Wasn't our opening hymn inspiring? Hymn 608, known as the Navy Hymn, is very dramatic. I remember hearing about 500 British seamen singing this hymn in the Durham cathedral in July 2005, during an Evensong service observing the decommissioning of Her Majesty's Ship the Invincible. The ship had seen action in the Falkland Islands and other international conflicts, and on that day, she was being taken out of service. All the seamen, sailors and officers, were present for the solemn service of Evensong, and so were we. Our presence at this extraordinary event was just a coincidence of timing, in that Norm and I were on a tour of English cathedrals and we happened to stop in Durham that day. I have never heard the hymn sung so powerfully. None of the seamen were using hymnals – they all knew the hymn.

I heard it again recently, while watching the 1998 movie "Titanic," when the words were not only dramatic but prescient – "O hear us when we call to thee, for those in peril on the sea." At that point, the passengers had no idea what lay in store for them. Later, as the grand ocean liner sank to the bottom of the sea, the ship's orchestra played "Nearer My God To Thee." Indeed.

So, this brings us to today's Gospel reading, when Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, and a huge storm came up. The disciples were terrified. Jesus was asleep. They woke him up and asked with crazed eyes, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus spoke, not to them, but to the wind and the sea, saying, "Peace! Be still!" and then there was peace and stillness. Then he spoke to his frightened followers, asking, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

We can't blame the disciples for being frightened. I mean, what are the odds, a tiny boat against a huge storm? Of course, with Jesus in the boat, the odds were much better!

What were the odds in the physical contest we heard about in our first lesson? Goliath, the Philistine, was a huge giant of a man, covered in heavy armor, issuing a challenge to the Israelites: Send out one man to fight me. If he prevails, the Philistines will be the Israelites' servants. If Goliath prevails, the Israelites will be enslaved to the Philistines. Wow. None of the Israelites wanted to fight Goliath. Except David. Little David, eighth son of Jesse, so underage that he wasn't even in the army, but just visiting his brothers. He heard Goliath's challenge and offered to fight him. We all know how that turned out: David fought in the name of the Lord, carrying only some stones. Flinging one at Goliath, David scores a win: David's stone hit the giant in the forehead and felled him. We are hearing this story today as part of the continuing story of David, but how astonishing to hear this story of courage, next to the story of Jesus' disciples frightened by the storm. David invokes God's help, and the disciples awaken Jesus for help. With God, all things are possible.

There's an old saying: There are no atheists in foxholes. If you are under fire, you are likely to invoke God's help whether you believe in God or not. The disciples go to find Jesus when the sailing gets rough. We might do the same in our lives, when the proverbial sailing gets rough, when we fear becoming swamped by circumstances, or being swept overboard by life's challenges. We might literally ask God to save us from our crises. All these appeals to God for help are completely normal, whether by people of faith, or anyone in trouble.

But I find comfort in knowing that Jesus is in the boat with me. No matter what happens to me, I am assured by God's presence. To live in this kind of trust can indeed calm the raging waters and storms of our lives and bring us peace. That's what Jesus says when he speaks to the storm: Peace. Be still. That's when we can find that peaceful stillness within us, and with quiet confidence face whatever comes.