

“The Swirling Storm”

Job 9:4-12

Mark 6:45-52

“*Thuma mina, thuma mina, thuma mina somandla.*” Literally, it means “send me, send me, send me, Lord.” Usually our Benediction Response is pretty upbeat. It’s one of the last moments we share together in worship and it drives us to go out into the world and follow Christ. But, like our Kyrie, it comes from a collection of songs that were sung by South Africans in the struggle against apartheid. Inside the church may feel safe, but outside? There was a lot to be afraid of. Send me, Lord and I’ll know you are with me.

Trevor Noah is a South African comedian who was born in 1984. His mother is Black and his father is white. It was literally against the law for him to exist. His mother was a bold, faithful woman. She made sure they went to, “three churches every Sunday, a prayer meeting on Tuesday, Bible study on Wednesday and youth church on Thursday.” Church was a place where they were in community; where they remembered time and again that they were children of God, loved and holy, no matter what the laws of their nation said.

In an unwelcoming world, danger was around every corner. But his mother had a knack for learning languages. When people spoke to her, she could often respond in the same language. Just hearing their own language seemed to shift the balance in so many situations. Like his mother, Trevor learned six different languages and many dialects. Once, when he was young, there were some Zulu guys who were approaching him in a way that made him uneasy. Assuming that he wouldn’t understand their language, they started openly talking to each other about their plans to attack him and mug him. Trevor understood them, but he knew he couldn’t fight them; he knew he didn’t have time to run away. He turned around and spoke to them in Zulu: “Yo, guys, why don’t we just mug someone together? I’m ready. Let’s do it.”

After what must have seemed like an endless silence, the guys started cracking up. They said, “Oh, sorry dude. We thought you were something else. We weren’t trying to take anything from you.... Have a good day, man.” In a moment, he went from someone who was about to be violently attacked to someone who was cool to let go on his way. Over and over, he describes this experience of tense/angry/suspicious encounters that change on a dime when he speaks another language. Once they hear him speak, it’s like their thinking reformed: “Oh, OK. I thought you were a stranger. We’re good then.”

One of the problems that the disciples seem to run into again and again is that they don’t recognize Jesus. As he walked with them, he taught them and challenged them. There was so much they needed to understand, such great risks and leaps of faith that would be needed in the future! But, like us, they often failed to see who Jesus was, what he was doing, and why.

Jesus sent them on ahead to cross the Sea of Galilee so he could have some time alone. Sometime in the night, a swirling storm arose. The boat was battered by waves, the wind was against them, and – try as they might – their strength was not enough to row the boat onward. Imagine what they were thinking – that they had been abandoned; that all hope was lost! And the Sea of Galilee is no little pond. Its area is about 64.4 square miles and at its deepest point it is 141 feet deep. All this is true – but from the shoreline, Jesus saw his disciples miles and miles away in the middle of a lake in the middle of the night. He saw them, but they didn’t see him.

The translation we heard said that it was “very early in the morning.” The Greek says it was “the fourth watch of the night,” which is within three hours of the sunrise. Think about what it looks like as the dawn slowly arrives – indirect light scattering everywhere. In this hazy, in between space in time, it’s harder to make out things that are right in front of your face. Add to that the swirling, howling storm and the long night the disciples have spent trying to stay afloat.

Then there's something, something passing near the boat – a shifting of the light, a reflection on the sea? It must be a phantom – maybe a spirit that means them harm. There is nothing left to do but scream and freak out. Before they were in trouble, but now they're doomed!

We weren't in the boat with them. We have the benefit of hearing this story from Jesus's perspective. When he saw how much they were struggling, he moved heaven and earth, violating the laws of physics to be near them. And maybe...maybe he thought that if they saw him passing by, they would realize that they weren't alone. Maybe just a glimpse of him would remind them of the power of God and the certainty of their call. But when they saw Jesus, they didn't see Jesus. They only saw their fear. Jesus changes his plan. If walking by was not enough to reassure them, he would speak peace to them and get in their boat. He tells them to have courage; he tells them "it's me!" Please don't be ruled by your fear. As soon as he gets in the boat, the wind ceases and all is still. The disciples were astonished and overwhelmed.

Earlier that day, the disciples had come back from a mission trip. Jesus sent them out, but they weren't allowed to bring any food and money; they stayed in strangers' houses. They preached the gospel, cast out demons, and healed the sick. On the day that they returned to Jesus, they gathered around to tell him about everything that had happened when they were away. Jesus invited them to a deserted place to rest, but, even then, crowds of people found them and followed them. This became the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples didn't believe that Jesus could possibly provide for such a large group of people, especially when they only had five loaves and two fish. Yet, before their very eyes, he blessed the meal, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples to feed the crowd. All ate and all were filled.

Jesus calmed the wind and the waves; he reminded the disciples that he was there – that he had been there all along. But they didn't understand about the loaves. They didn't understand

that he had been trying to get them to recognize that – whatever the need, whatever the danger, whatever the fear – I am with you. Was the miracle of that evening so soon forgotten as morning light began to shine?

Trevor and his Mom learned a new and different way to connect to people – speaking in their own language to prove that they weren't really strangers. Jesus spent his whole life showing people who he was and who we are. With each parable, with each miracle, with each spark of grace, he wanted us to see that we shouldn't be strangers. He wants us to be able to see him in all dangers, in all victories, in all opportunities, in all people.

In our lesson from the Old Testament, Job takes great pains to remind us who God is: wise, strong, unassailable. God created the heaven and the earth, controls whether the sun rises or not, scattered the stars across the sky. God is this and... and we must not forget who it was that made a way through the sea, trampling the waves. God of creation, God of the Red Sea, God beyond our knowing. Job wrestles with the marvelous nature of God as he tries to make sense of the fear and danger he is suffering. Job says, "Look, God passes by me, and I don't see. God moves on, but I am not even aware of movement... Who will say to God, 'What are you doing?'"

God is near when we see and when we don't see. God is acting in our world in powerful ways that aren't always disclosed to us. God is God of the swirling storm and of the tranquil silence. If we are swallowed up by our fear, we miss how much greater God is than all that is. In life and in death we belong to God. Why should Christ's self-giving love fade from our awareness? Why should our doubts overpower our instinct? No matter what happens – God's got this.

The challenge is to see beyond our fear. When we speak, when we pray, when we act, we have the chance to be – not a stranger, but a friend. We have the chance to live into the image of Christ that can be recognized by people we've never even met. Every day, there is struggle. Every day, there is fear. Every day, there is the Holy Spirit. *Thuma mina, thuma mina, thuma mina*, send me Lord. Amen.

Resources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born\\_a\\_Crime](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_a_Crime)

<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/503009220>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea\\_of\\_Galilee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee)

<https://classicalwisdom.com/culture/history/date-and-time-in-ancient-rome/>