

Calm
Mark 4:35-41
Colebrook Congregational Church
Ordinary 12 / June 21, 2015

When I studied today's selection, I checked the commentaries and all the usual things, and in the Interpreter's Bible, I found a note by the expositor. He said that Phillips Brooks had written a very good sermon on this story and that the reader should go read that. Nothing else about it, the expositor just tossed that out there and carried on with his exposition.

Phillips Brooks was born in Boston in 1835, a descendent of Rev. John Cotton, the person who originated our churches' name change to Congregational. Brooks was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1860, serving as Rector of a church in Philadelphia for nine years, then becoming the Rector of Trinity Church in Boston. The current edifice was being built during this time and Brooks was instrumental in designing it. The cathedral has been called "the American Hagia Sophia." He was installed as the Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891, which he served as for 15 months until his death.

Phillips Brooks was known for his preaching, and for ecumenical cooperation. He was evangelist to Helen Keller and was a preacher at Yale. In his honor: There is The Brooks School in North Andover; Statues at Virginia Theological Seminary, Copley Square, and in and around Trinity Church; and a student-run consortium of volunteer organizations at that community college in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

However, we all know him better as the author of the Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." I also know him as my first cousin, times removed.

With it being Father's Day and Phillips Brooks being a male ancestor, I decided to find that sermon mentioned in the exposition. I did find it, entitled, "Storm and Calm," so instead of my usual exegesis on the scripture, I will quote his, updating the language a bit, and then adding my own illustrations.

HOW strongly and satisfyingly these words come in at the close of the story of the storm upon the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus and His disciples are sailing across the lake together. ... There is the noise and hurry and fight. The wild winds and clouds overhead, the wild waters beneath, the panicstricken hearts within the boat. One moment all is tumult and distress. The next moment Jesus has risen from the pillow where He is sleeping and looked around, and said a word, and made a gesture, and all is changed. "There is a great calm." The beauty of the story is in the way in which the change all comes from and belongs to Jesus. When He rises, the storm stops. The calm that comes is from the power of His presence.

As if a strong, quiet man stepped in majestically among a crowd of noisy brawlers, and his very appearance made them ashamed and hushed their noise. So Jesus steps in among the elements, and they are still in a moment. It is a picture of the peace that He bestows. However feebly we understand it, the story at least is luminous to every loving eye with this—the majesty and beauty of Christ and the way in which peace flows out abundantly wherever He is truly present. ... A period of tumult comes and passes. ... And when it has fought itself out in its fury, it goes down and there is peace. ... Peace comes where there used to be suspense. There is a great calm. ... Some [people] do find it far more easily than others—indeed, some lives are placid by their very make and nature—... that there must be a calmness and repose consistent with the fullest life and the most faithful duty and the most earnest thought, of which almost all [people] almost entirely miss. ... [But] There is the chafing and restlessness that goes on in [even] the quietest lives, and now and then we are taken by surprise when we are able to look down through some break in the most restless and excited career and see in what perfect repose of soul the man is living underneath it all.

[People] try sometimes to calm the tumult of the inner life for themselves, or for one another, by merely making the outward circumstances calm and peaceful, but it does no good. It is only dressing the maniac in a quaker's clothes. They may hush and awe him for a moment with their serene composure, but after the moment's hush is over he will be as wild as ever, and tear his uncongenial dress to tatters. Neither the calmness of temperament nor

the calmness of circumstances, then, is what we mean. Both of these, of course, are gifts of God. ... It is God who lays [God's] hand upon a new life just going out from [God's] creative presence and gives it a peacefulness and calm which it brings back to [God] when it returns for judgment. ... It seems to be in some higher sense appreciable as a gift when it enters in through our consciousness by [Gods'] discipline than when He sows it among the seeds of our unconscious being before we are born. And so it is the calmness that comes from our own thoughtful, fruitful experience of life that we want most to consider and be thankful for. ...

And now let us come and consider what the calmness is which, brought out by the discipline of life, may be really accepted as God's gift. The truth seems to me to be this: that the calmness to which God is always leading us consists in a perfect poise of tasks and powers. And this idea is valuable because as we follow it out it explains both the attainment of calmness and the loss of calmness which occur in every growing life, and shows how they are consistent with one another. Let us look into this. ...

One of the biggest times of tumult in my life was when I went away to college. I wasn't even 18 at the time, and I found myself for the first time on my own, out of state. I did not have the interpersonal skills that I have now, and I didn't know anyone there. Less than ten people on campus spoke in a way that sounded familiar to me, let alone dealing with the different idioms. Even the air smelled different. Autumn looked different, the leaves just turned brown. Then there was my roommate. He started by putting all the furniture right down the middle of the room to divide it into two very small spaces. He overused the aqua velvet. He always had to have his way, and would cause issues if he wasn't obeyed. Every aspect of life there, at first, was stressful to say the least, and I had not yet developed the coping mechanisms I needed for that setting.

There is an expression, "the freshmen fifteen," noting how most gain fifteen pounds during their first year of college. For me, the stress was such that I instead lost fifty! I was not able to go home for Fall Break, but that was too much. I insisted that I visit home the next weekend. So my father drove his

first midlife crisis through four states to save me from that tumult. On the way home, I unloaded all of what I had been feeling and going through to him. My father chose to take the Merritt Parkway instead of 95 or 84 to 8, during the peak of autumn. I leaned back in his convertible and just watched the blue sky and the colorful canopy speed by, feeling the familiar air rush over me.

Experiencing God's Creation gave me calm in that moment, but I knew that I needed to do something else when I return to college. My Pastor and I prayed together, and when I went back, I did the same thing. I continued to pray to Jesus. In my prayers, sometimes I would just talk, sometimes I would pray familiar formulas. I would pray for peacefulness, for guidance, for comfort, and even for my roommate. I found that after each prayer, I would feel a divine calm in my life. And each day, things got better.

Everyone experiences tumults in their lives. Sometimes daily; And relief is needed. In the midst of chaos in our lives, we can cope with it. Through hobbies, art, physical activities, meditations, guided imagery, and many other things. But those things are like a pontoon to the boat being tossed about on the water. It makes things better, steadies us, but the tumult is still there. So for me, what we should take away from this story is that when the waves of our lives are tumultuous, threatening to overturn our boats, and the pontoons we try are just not enough, then Jesus is there if we need Him. We just have to Call out to Him.

Amen

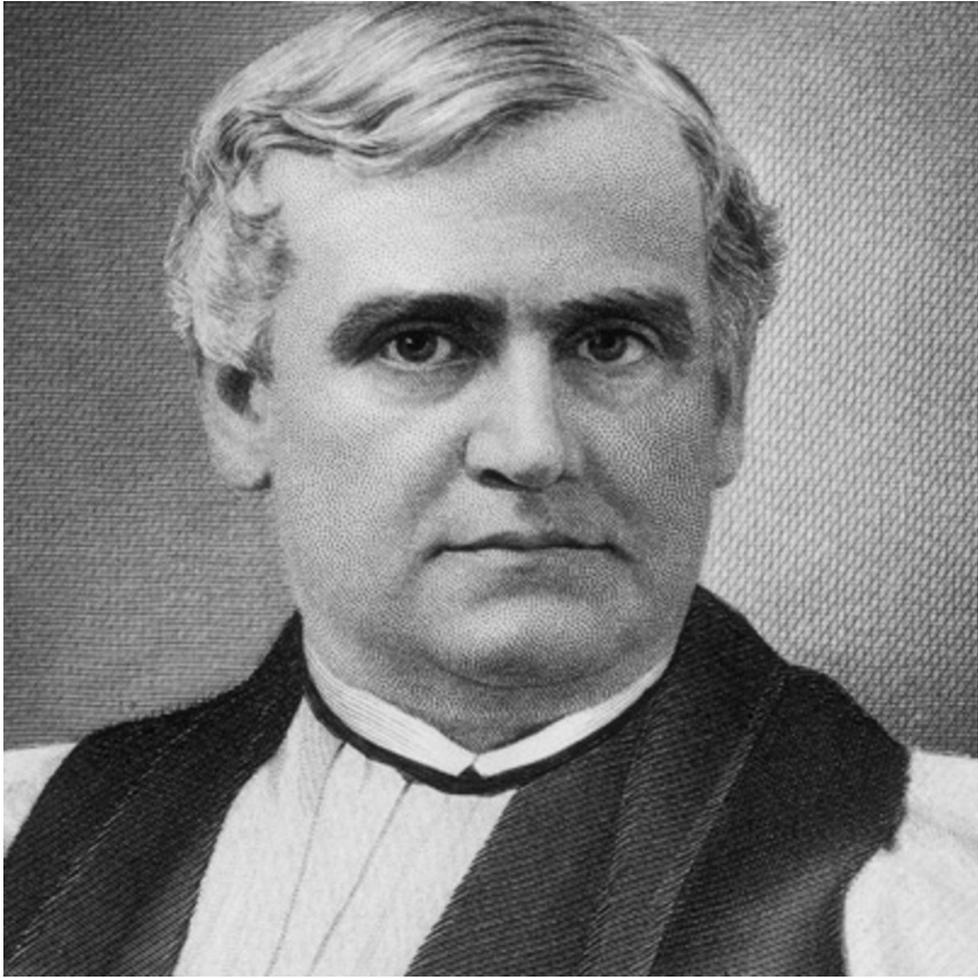
Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

Gracious God, Friend of those in need, your Son has untied our burdens and healed our spirits. You call us to love and serve you with body, mind, and spirit; through loving your creation and our sisters and brothers. You invite us to hold the needs of our brothers and sisters as dear as we hold our own. Open our hearts in compassion and receive these petitions on behalf of the needs of our community and the world. We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need that we have raised up, and those we have kept in our hearts.

We offer prayers...

Hear our prayers that we may love you with our whole being and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Your voice enlightens the depths of our being, Hear these petitions of your people and speak a word of comfort, that we may proclaim to all the earth the glory of your name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Phillips Brooks