

PENTECOST 5

Proper 7 - Year B

Amy Crawford has, for the last 20 years, worked at the intersection of ministry and psychology. She holds a Masters in Clinical and Counseling Psychology, with a concentration in adolescent psychology and pastoral counseling. Amy has worked as a trauma and spirituality therapist for youth and young adults; worked as Associate Pastor of Spiritual Care and Counseling at Liquid Church, a top-100 fastest growing church in the US, and is currently in the process of becoming ordained in The Episcopal Church and receiving a M.Div from General Theological Seminary. She also consults as an organizational psychologist and as a trauma/neurodiversity specialist to various organizations, including seminaries and para-church organizations. Amy, along with her husband, are parents to four daughters. In her (few) spare moments, she is a classically trained professional pianist who enjoys playing Bach, an avid native-plants gardener, and is passionate about liturgy and Benedictine spirituality.

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Job 38:1-11

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

²“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone

⁷when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

⁸“Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,

⁹when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,

¹⁰and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,

¹¹and said, “Thus far shall you come and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped?”

Commentary from Amy Crawford

God bends low and draws near, even when it seems almost impossible that God cares.

The Book of Job outlines the tragedy of Job, who has lost everything dear to him, everything he loves, everything that is meaningful and real in his world. Even worse, it seems arbitrary, a cruel destruction that he did not deserve. His friends come by and question and provoke, trying to understand what might have caused this. Job cries out to God, wishing to die. How could a loving God, a caring God, a creating God witness such destruction? They all desperately try to make sense of what feels absolutely senseless.

We approach this passage just as God approached Job. Amazingly, this God who has seemed so distant bends low and draws near. Close to Job, leaning into Job's pain, as close as Job's own heartbeat. In this passage, as if playing an Imax movie of the process of creation, God simultaneously reminds Job of God's own power, and of Job's own created and sustained being. Poetically, God gives Job not the philosophical answers that his friends try to provide, but one that is perhaps more sustaining and meaningful. In the broad scope of suffering, God is near, Job's own grief is dwarfed, yet held, by this creator whose hands hold all that was, and is, and is to come.

Discussion Questions

Can you recall a time in your life when all seemed lost, yet God drew near?

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

- ¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, *
and his mercy endures for ever.
- ² Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim
*
that he redeemed them from the hand of the
foe.
- ³ He gathered them out of the lands; *
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.
- ²³ Some went down to the sea in ships *
and plied their trade in deep waters;
- ²⁴ They beheld the works of the Lord *
and his wonders in the deep.
- ²⁵ Then he spoke, and a stormy wind arose, *
which tossed high the waves of the sea.
- ²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and fell back to
the depths; *
their hearts melted because of their peril.
- ²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunkards *
and were at their wits' end.
- ²⁸ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.
- ²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper *
and quieted the waves of the sea.
- ³⁰ Then were they glad because of the calm, *
and he brought them to the harbor they were
bound for.
- ³¹ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy *
and the wonders he does for his children.
- ³² Let them exalt him in the congregation of the
people *
and praise him in the council of the elders.

Commentary from Amy Crawford

There are very few people on this earth who have not faced a desperate moment. You know the one – where it suddenly feels as if you are pitching around on a too-small boat in dangerous seas. Your stomach lurches and you grab for something to steady you, and yet the waves keep crashing. What can one do when faced with those roiling seas, but pray and hope?

The psalmist recounts such a moment, in words that take the shape of a litany of thanksgiving for safe travels. Rarely was a litany more needed than for journeying on the sea, where five minutes could be the difference between sunny skies and raging storms. But it's not the tumultuous journey that catches attention in this psalm; rather, it is the framing at the beginning and end – a thanksgiving for God's mercy. Giving thanks to God before the narrative of the stormy seas reminds us that God has a history of mercy that endures, which fills us with confidence for the journey ahead. And ending with thanks hems in our narratives of hard moments with reminders that God has been with us and will be again.

Discussion Questions

How might our perspective shift if we gave thanks to God not just after coming through a hard time, but also when we begin entering into one?

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

6 As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! 3 We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, 9 as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, 10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

11 We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. 12 There is no restriction in our affections but only in yours. 13 In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

Commentary from Amy Crawford

Now is the time! This is the drumbeat that thrums under this passage, a call to action for a church that has been coasting. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians touches on similar themes to the first: a concern that while this church has given lip service to God, the rubber-hits-the-road transformation that comes with truly believing in resurrection life isn’t visible. He implores them: don’t take the grace of God in vain.

Now is the day! Paul orients the Corinthians to what it really looks like to live life head-over-heels for Jesus. For one, it means counter-cultural work that looks foolish to the world yet is rich in wisdom and meaning for those who are desperate for the living Word. Living a gospel of reconciliation doesn’t always make friends (one just needs to look at many martyred saints!), and it inevitably comes with being wounded. Yet, when one’s heart is firm in the truth of Christ, it has the ability to remain wide open, like Christ’s arms on the cross.

Salvation is now, and Paul’s message is clear: Faith in Jesus’ reconciling, overwhelming, wonderful-good-news love for us is the foundation to living a Gospel life; and that life is rooted first in taking God at God’s word. And what better Word than Christ’s love for us?

Discussion Questions

Who have you seen that embodies living a life in Christ? How has it impacted you?

What stops you from stepping fully into belief in Jesus’ love for you? What parts of your life does Jesus need to be in for that resistance to fade?

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ 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?” ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹ 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?”

Commentary from Amy Crawford

I’ll never forget what my spiritual director told me, during the long years that my children were young and I was a tired working mother. “Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do”, she would say, “is take a nap.” Only years later did I realize the wisdom in her words: surrendering the to-do lists and the chores and the work-to-be-done to rest is an act of faith and trust.

The story of Jesus and the disciples on the boat can be read on many levels – there is a lot happening here, from the faithfulness of the disciples in continuing to follow Jesus across a sea, to the power of Jesus over nature itself. At the heart of it all, though, is a nap. A nap during a storm, in a sinking, rolling boat, during what was likely shouting and bucket-flinging and crashing waves. How could anyone sleep through such a thing? Yet here is Jesus, deep at rest, taking a moment for restoration during some (supposed) downtime. Jesus’ questions towards the disciples once the winds have calmed frame this story: “Have you still no faith”? Jesus was able to rest because he had faith. Radical, faithful trust in God’s mercy and provision, come what may. Jesus knew that what God has started, God will see to completion, despite the waves and breakers that threaten the journey. This is perhaps one of the hardest lessons of discipleship, that God is ultimately (and wonderfully) in control; and there isn’t much we can truly do, other than rest and trust.

Discussion Questions

What does rest mean to you? How does God want to bring more of it into your life?

What does trusting God mean to you? What might God be asking you to let go of, and trust that God will care for?