

The Lutheran Church of the Atonement
Florissant, Missouri
Proper 7 -- Year B
Fathers' Day Weekend
June 19-20, 2021
Job 38:1-11; St. Mark 4:35-41
Second Corinthians 6:1-13

It was funny in a perverse sort of way. Back in that three-year interval between my diagnosis and surgeries for testicular cancer and the time when my urologist finally said, "Rick, you're going to die,...but from something else!" I needed, every three months, to get checked out by the urologist and then to go over to Missouri Baptist Hospital for lab tests. So, I would go over to the hospital, turn in the doctor's orders, and sit and wait. And, other people would come and go, and I would sit and wait. And, more people would come and go, and I would sit and wait and wonder what on earth was going on. Well, one of the three tumors I had had was a very rare cancer called a teratoma. And, there is a test for the recurrence of a teratoma. And, that test is for an elevated level of alpha-fetoprotein. (Some of you are smiling.) For, an alpha-fetoprotein test is a standard pregnancy test. And, the technicians at the lab were looking at the doctor's orders and thinking, "This is a pregnancy test,...and that's a guy!" So, while I sat in the waiting room and waited, they were calling over to the doctor's office to determine whether or not to administer this test. So, after a few rounds of this, I finally wised up and asked the doctor to write on his orders, "Yes, this is the right test."

In today's Gospel reading, after Jesus calms the storm on the sea of Galilee -- which is known for ferocious storms, by the way -- Jesus turns to His disciples and asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Interesting. For, in the days and weeks immediately beforehand, according to Mark, Jesus had driven out an unclean spirit,...healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law,..."healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons" throughout Galilee,...cleansed a

leper,...rehabilitated a paralytic,...restored a withered hand,...healed even more from as far away as Tyre and Sidon,...and cast out even more demons and unclean spirits. And, so, the first semester being over, perhaps, Jesus decided it was time for a test.

For years, I have confided to students what, I suspect, some teachers keep to themselves, namely, that the real reason that teachers give tests to students is not to determine how well the students are doing, but to determine how well the teacher is doing. How well are we imparting the material, how well are we developing the skills, how well are we facilitating the ability for students to think and to learn and to analyze on their own? In other words, do they understand what we are trying to accomplish in and for them? In short, do they get it? Are they ready to "go it" on their own?

I wonder if that was on Jesus's mind, as He sensed that a storm was brewing on the sea and decided to take a nap at the back of the boat. "Do they get it? Are they ready to 'go it' on their own?" He'd soon find out.

How often in life don't we feel like we are being tested, as our hard work goes unrewarded,...as an illness saps our strength and our resources,...as a family relationship goes sour,...as a friend takes advantage of us,...as a long-awaited opportunity is denied us,...as death deprives us of a close companion,...as a huge institution gets away with an injustice just because it can. And, we feel as though something or someone is putting us to the test. But, perhaps, somewhere, somehow, we hear a calming voice asking, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

In a book filled with stories of people whose faith is put to the test, one of the most memorable is the story of Job,...Job, who suffers more misfortune than any of us can imagine,...Job, who questions God's protection, much as the disciples question Jesus's protection,...Job, who finally learns

the lessons of faith and entrusts himself to the grace of God,...Job, who emerges from his time of testing with a faith far stronger than it had been before the test began, with a willingness to submit to the will of God far greater than it had every been. Can that story be our story, as well?

Well, having seen how his disciples performed on this test, Jesus -- good teacher that He is -- realized that He had more work to do. They didn't quite "get it." They weren't quite ready to "go it" on their own. So, some of the lessons He would repeat, the healings, the exorcisms. He would tell stories to explain what they meant and why they mattered. To reinforce the lessons, he would raise a little girl from the dead and endure rejection in His own hometown.

And, then, no doubt to test His own ability as a teacher, He gave them another test. In the midst of a barren wilderness, He handed them two fish and five loaves of bread, and sent them out to feed 5,000 men and their families. They did better on that one, then, not so well that evening, when Jesus braved high winds to walk to them on the water.

But, even as His teaching ministry continued, He knew that one great final test awaited them -- a time when even He and His faith would be put to the test. And, when He announced that test, one of them failed immediately by insisting that the test be cancelled. But, His final exam was not to be cancelled, for He would be taking it -- not for Himself -- but for each one of us. And, it would be a one-question test, the very question He Himself had asked in the boat: "Have you still no faith?" All the forces of evil would be arrayed against Him: "Have you no faith?" Injustice would prevail, and death would await: "Have you no faith?" His blood would flow; His strength would fail; the pain would intensity: "Have you no faith?" In many ways, it's a one-question test. "When every other support gives way, can you still trust the God who loves you?" And, to that one-

question final test, He gave a one-line answer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

As with the disciples, life so often keeps putting us to the test. And, as with the disciples, with each succeeding test, our faith can grow stronger. Before long, we too begin to "get it." Yes, God can be trusted. Before long, like the disciples, we too are able to "go it" on our own. And, yet, somehow, the tests keep coming. And, the question is always the same: "Can you still trust the God who loves you?" To which someone, somehow, has added the notation: "Yes, this is the right test."

Amen