**4 Pentecost, June 21, 2015; 1 Samuel 17:57-18:5; Ps 133: 2 Cor 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41;**

**Rev Mary Trainor**

**"Could we not argue that America is about freedom whether we live it out or not? But it's really about freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. And that is what church is all about: freedom to worship and freedom from sin, freedom to be full of what God intends us to be, and to have equality in the sight of God....We don't see ourselves as just a place people come to worship, but as a beacon, and a bearer of the culture, and a bearer of what makes us a people."** These moving and eloquent words are by Pastor and State Senator Clementa Pinckney, who was murdered this past Wednesday in a mass shooting during a bible study in his church, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina). We know the Lord has opened the gates of heaven for our brother in Christ, Pastor Pinckney, and eight of his parishioners: Cynthia, Sharonda, Ethel, Trwanza, Myra, DePayne, Daniel and Susie. Let us now keep a minute of silent prayer for them.

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Indeed, church is to be a beacon of freedom, a place where, in spite of the challenges and crises of life, we can gather to worship the Lord and to grow to become what God intends for us each to be. The Bible is a big part of that growth. Today's readings teach us about dealing with life's trials; and trials we do have! The list of things we can be concerned and afraid of is long. St Paul pretty much captures this whole list in our Epistle reading this morning: "***afflictions,*** ***hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger."*** Yet, because of the life and resurrection of Jesus, we find hope ***"in Christ***" and live as new creations of Christ, seeing everything in light of the cross. Our It's like our lives are like a journey across a great body of water, and we are in a boat. Sometimes, the waters are calm, and clear blue, and beautiful. But at other times, the storms of life rage around us and the boat we are in threatens to capsize.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is in a boat on the Sea of Galilee with the apostles: a small boat in a large, unpredictable body of water! The whole scene was full of things to be afraid of for the disciples, in spite of their experience as fishermen. It was nighttime, not an ideal time to go right across the middle of the Sea - especially before radar and weather forecasting were invented! And, back then 2000 years ago, people were frightened of the sea at night: they thought evil serpents might emerge from the dark water. Then, if this was not scary enough, Jesus was directing them to go to a foreign, dangerous land. But they obeyed, and took Jesus out in the boat as He had directed them. Then "***a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped***." The boat was at risk of sinking! They must have been screaming in fear! And, what was Jesus doing all during this time? He "***was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.***" What a huge contrast: the calm of Jesus sleeping and the drama of the fierce storm! But, the disciples knew Jesus, so they woke Him up and asked for help. Did Jesus chew them out for waking Him up? No. Instead, He took immediate action in response to their need. Jesus said, "***Peace. Be still***" and the storm ceased, the waters and wind calmed. Whew! And, can you just imagine what the disciples were doing then? Probably just sitting there, still shaking, staring blankly at Jesus - with awe and incredible relief. But, Jesus then says "***Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?***" He is helping them see that being in His presence, being filled with Him as believers and as His followers, having faith in Him, really does matter. It matters in the calm times in life, and it matters in the stormy times. The word "***still***" is an important one here, for it is in reference to Jesus' now familiar relationship with the disciples. They aren't to be fearful of things that can happen to them in life, when they are with Jesus. **We** aren't to be fearful of things that can happen to us in life, as we are "***in Christ***." As His followers, we have a close relationship with God 24/7 no matter what else is going on. It says "***do not be afraid***" about 345 times in the Bible -- God hits us over the head with this one! We are not to be afraid because God is with us. Isaiah 41:10 says, " ***Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."***God is indeed in the boat with us as we journey through the sea of life. God is in the midst of every situation, wants us to bother Him and say what we need. And, Jesus is there saying ***"Peace! Be still!"*** The question is, will we ask Him, will we hear Him, will we receive His comfort, His help?

Anglican priest, John Wesley, left England in October of 1735 on a big sailing ship called *the Simmonds* bound for a new ministry call in America (Georgia). Also on the ship were some people of the Moravian Christian faith, and he got to know them. One day, in the midst of their daily prayer service, a huge storm arose in the Atlantic Ocean and the main sail split into pieces, water poured onto the deck of the sheep, and it seemed like the great ocean was swallowing up the ship. John joined the rest of most of the people on the ship by screaming and screaming in fright. But then, John looked over and in the midst of all that screaming were the Moravians who were still calmly carrying on their praying. When the storm calmed down and it appeared the ship was not going to go down after all, Wesley asked one of the Moravians, "**were you not afraid during the storm?"** and they answered that they were not fearful of anything. Wesley was so impressed by their deep faith and spirituality, and this led him into a deeper relationship with Christ from that day forward. John Wesley went onto have a powerful ministry; the Methodist denomination was started around the method of piety he advocated.

As we bring our concerns to Jesus, we begin to be able to see things through God's eyes instead of our own -- and we can let go of the things that cause us to be fearful or anxious. Pray with me now the Welcoming Prayer of Fr. Thomas Keating, in your pews: "**Welcome, welcome, welcome. I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know that it is for my healing. I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions. I let go of my desire for power and control, I let go of my desire for survival and security. I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person, or myself. I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within." Amen.**