

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Seven years ago I went on a mission to Kenya. We worked hand-in-hand with the local Habitat for Humanity to build homes, stone homes with no electricity and no running water, but a home with four walls and a roof, not a temporary humanitarian response tent used for the last three years when it was only designed for at most six months of use. And we were in Kenya, building these homes, for IDPs, that is Internally Displaced Persons, in other words, refugees, but still in their own country, forced to flee their ancestral lands due to political and tribal violence that nearly descended into outright civil war. 98 percent of these IDPs, these human beings, were women and children (many of whom were not even the children of the women who watched over them), with the only men being those who were too old to put up resistance during the fighting and were forced to flee. The men, the fathers and husbands, of these people were dead.

Their stories were stories of terror, of fear, of violence, of death, stories that none of us have ever had to live through, stories that none of us will hopefully ever have to live through, stories that no human being should have to live through. But one surprising thread through all of their stories, a theme that should not have been surprising in retrospect, but still a surprise to this sheltered, privileged, white male from America, was their unwavering faith that God would carry them through their moments of trial. As they wandered on foot for days, leaving the only land their family had ever known for centuries if not millennia, hiding from those who wished to do them harm, they had faith that God would carry them through, that they would find safe harbor, that life would resume in some

shape or fashion. That one day a bunch of well-meaning white people from Kansas would come into their lives for a week and help build a couple of homes for them.

I can't help but think of the stories I heard during my time in Kenya when I see the atrocities our government is carrying out against refugees and asylum seekers. I can't help but think of the stories I heard during my time in Kenya, because I have to have faith that God will carry the asylum seekers and refugees through this moment in time, I have to have faith that God will carry those who would stand up against these injustices only to meet walls of bureaucracy and false narratives, I have to have faith that God will move the hearts of those intent on committing evil, move the hearts of those who are convinced that this evil is morally just and right because of a misguided sense that justice must be carried out, excepting the fact that this is clearly not God's justice, justice which is based on love, on forgiveness, on helping our neighbor in whatever way we can. I can't help but think of the stories I heard during my time in Kenya when I see the news today, and when I read the Gospel today.

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Why are we afraid? Do we have no faith that God will provide peace?

Distorting God because of fear is a privilege of the powerful, used to further stoke fears rather than bring peace. How else can you explain the Bible being used to justify policies that are explicitly designed to create chaos and harm? If the Bible is used to justify, then the policy must be just. It leads us to think that families legally crossing the border

seeking asylum are the waves and wind battering against the boat of America, threatening to swamp us over.

Except, it is these policies and those who implemented them that are the storm, are the waves crashing around the boat and battering it. Think about it, the wind that is threatening to divide our boat, to drive us into chaos and despair, cannot be those human beings, our neighbors, who are coming to us seeking help. No, the wind that batters us is the evil that has been allowed to act with impunity in ways that are immoral, unjust, and just plain wrong.

So, what do we do about it?

If there is one thing to take from today's Gospel it's that we must have faith in the face of the storm. That no matter how turbulent the waters get, Christ is with us and will guide and protect us. We may panic and wake the humble teacher who is resting comfortably amidst the chaos. And in that moment, he may awake to rebuke the wind and sea, but then we must be ready to answer his questions: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

It's not like this is an easy lesson to live into. Having faith in the midst of the storm is hard. It is anxiety inducing. It challenges us to face fear head on, rather than wallow in it. It challenges us to look past the easy answer, "Just wake Jesus up, he'll take care of it," because it's not that simple for us anymore. Yes, Jesus is with us, in this boat being tossed by the storm, but it is our turn to face the wind and sea and proclaim "Peace! Be still!"

This is a moment in the life of our society where the name of Jesus must be invoked to rebuke the storm. To stand up and say that beyond all of the ills in our society,

acknowledging that pain and harm and family separation of a sort happens to “our people”, that is citizens, when they commit crimes, that this practice happening at our borders goes beyond any practice that is otherwise practiced in the American Judicial system. That this practice happening at our borders, of separating families and now having no plans on how or when to reunite them, of having “tender care” facilities specifically designed for infants, of jailing entire families, is being done to those who are turning themselves in, legally seeking asylum, legally asking the government to hear their stories of unchecked violence, of outright fear, of knowing what will happen when they cross the border into America and being willing to do it anyways because even the pain, torture, and lack of humanity that we are showing towards them is still better than what they were facing at home.

We are allowing ourselves to become the storm, to become the wind that is blowing hard, to become the sea trying to swamp the boats of refugees to watch them drown. We need to be rebuked by Christ. We need to hear his words today, “Peace! Be still!” and in this we must respond with Christ to stand up and rebuke the wind that persists.

We do this by using our voice, using our faith, using Christ, to speak out against the atrocities that are carried out against our neighbor. What is happening at our borders is the most public instance right now of where our voice is needed, but it is not the only place our voice must be heard, and it is not the last our voice will ever be needed. What has been encouraging to me in this time, what has given strength to me in this time, what has given me calm to know that the storm is not to be feared, is the cacophony of voices that have stood up through the power of Christ to rebuke the storm and declare, “Peace! Be still!” But, we cannot rest, even as the storm switches gears, moving its attack from one side to the

other, we must persist, we must continue until there is real follow through, until every separated child is reunited with their family, until every asylum seeker is given a fair and just opportunity to state their case, to seek the shelter that has long been a promise of this great country that we have the privilege of living in, solely through luck of the draw. Until this happens, we are tasked with facing the fear of the storm, stand firm in our faith, and rebuke the wind and sea, declaring in a loud voice, "Peace! Be Still!"

In waking up Christ, the disciples asked this question, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Do you not care that we are perishing? Do you not care that your neighbor is perishing? Do you not care that innocent children are perishing? Do you not care?

If you do care, if what you have heard today makes you uncomfortable, makes you upset, then honor your faith by standing and rebuking the storm. If you are angry today, because I had the gall to so blatantly discuss politics, to you I say "Peace! Be still!" and listen to how the Holy Spirit moves through these words to address the evil of our time, to how the teachings we have received by Christ force us to stand against evil, even when that evil is politically charged. And, hear this, I will never be convinced that the health, safety, and humane treatment of others is a political issue. It is a human issue, it is a Christian issue, and it is the storm that threatens to sink us if we are unwilling to rebuke it. If we do, then we will know what it means to live in a world that experiences the reality of the command:

"Peace! Be still!"

Amen.