

Trinity Church in the City of Boston

The Rev. Morgan S. Allen

June 20, 2021

IV Pentecost, Mark 4:35-41

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle in the hearts of your faithful, the fire of your Love. *Amen.*

The music video begins with a young man waking in a very dirty apartment.ⁱ After turning off his alarm clock, standing and stretching, he reaches down and rips the warning label from the bare mattress where he slept. Billie Jo Armstrong, lead singer of the (now aging) poppy punk rockers Green Day, croons: “This is a public service announcement, this is only a test.”ⁱⁱ

The camera and we viewers then follow our video protagonist to his bathtub, where he promptly pulls down his lower eyelid and begins pouring a bottle of shampoo into his freshly exposed iris, all as he reaches over to turn on a radio he has plugged into the wall above the water spigot. Toweling off, the young man takes Q-tips and crams them – carelessly and two at-a-time – into the deep recesses of his ears, before lifting a pair of scissors from a nail beside the medicine cabinet mirror and running madly with them down a hallway.

Armstrong then sings the chorus: “Warning, warning: live without warning ... warning, warning: live without warning.”

The Gospel of Mark reads simple and spare, and, unlike its nieces – Luke, which tells the “Christmas account” of Jesus’ birth; and Matthew, which includes Jesus’ genealogy and the “Epiphany account” of the Wise Men’s trip to see him – the Gospel of Mark begins abruptly with John the Baptist’s appearance, the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus’ calling of the first disciples ... all in the first eighteen verses of the very first chapter!

The balance of chapter one – and then chapters two and three – includes demonstrations of Jesus’ power, beginning with his casting out an “unclean spirit” at a synagogue in Capernaum, continuing with his healing of a paralytic in the same town, and concluding with his appointment of “the twelve,” bringing them close with that declaration we heard two weeks ago: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Chapter four introduces a new section, a series of parables using agricultural imagery to describe the coming of God’s Kingdom: the parable of the sower, the parable of the growing seed, the parable of the mustard seed (that we heard last Sunday), and, of course, Jesus’ penning the lyrics to “This Little Light of Mine” – “put [the lamp] under the bushel basket ...?” *No.*^{iv}

The author of Mark's Gospel concludes this instruction with a note to the reader that Jesus, "with many such parables ... spoke the word to [the crowds] as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples."^v This short chorus moment transitions Jesus' teaching on the lake to today's lesson, which wraps-up chapter four: "On that day, when evening came, [Jesus] said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'"^{vi}

Even without a birth narrative, these first chapters introduce the reader to Jesus – and the introduction is rich: he's a friend, he's a traveler; he's a brother, he's a son; he's a teacher, he's a healer. Importantly, all these identities tether to the Gospel's beginning, to Jesus' baptism in chapter one, when "a voice from heaven [declares,] 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'^{vii} Like all that has come before it, this morning's story of Jesus' calming the sea is an identity narrative, an answer to the question that the disciples ask at the pericope's end: "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?"^{viii} And the Gospel has already delivered the answer: this Jesus is God's Beloved, and his proclamation is Good News for the whole creation.

As the music video continues, our young protagonist will do all those things our mamas and the Surgeon General warned us against: he stares directly at the sun; he eats before swimming; he downs a bottle of Nyquil and then operates heavy machinery; he accepts candy from a stranger; and he crosses the street without looking both ways. Playfully presenting the dangers of such obviously reckless behavior, Armstrong and Green Day offer the caution that living a life chained to warnings risks becoming victim to a different, but no less dangerous threat: a life lived *too* cautiously, one that risks the beauty of living – indeed, risks *living* itself.

In today's Gospel, the disciples misunderstand their relationship with Jesus as a kind of ultimate precaution, a warning label that God (a qualified service personnel) has stitched to mortal life with instructions on how to prevent serious injury.^{ix} In the rage of this stormy sea, they misunderstand their commitment to Christ as a guard against a watery grave, and Jesus' aggravation at their waking him – "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" – is *not* about their rousing him from sleep, or even about their doubt that he can calm the storm.^x Rather, Jesus grieves their refusal to trust that God has already saved them, no matter if they make it across the Sea ... God has *already* saved them, *no matter if they make it across the Sea*, and they need not fear! **This Jesus is God's Beloved, and nearness to him is salvation**, for fidelity allows the faithful to live a life without warning.

Fragile as we and the creation are, every moment of every day demands our entanglement with perils too many to count. We face *cosmic* threats: the expanding black hole that will one day swallow our humble galaxy; *global* threats: this terrible virus that will not let loose of us; *national* threats: our politics' polemics, racism, and violence; *personal* threats: perhaps a sick parent, a struggling child, a disease growing inside of us. Our Christian faith equips us to *confront* all these dangers, not as invulnerable, but as **free** ... because whether or not we make it to the other side of even these stormy seas, God already has saved *us*, too.

Significantly, a life lived without warning is not a life lived without risk. Indeed, Jesus' death on a cross should convincingly dissuade us of any such notion. Moreover, pursuing risk for risk's sake remains foolish, not courageous – if you start running with scissors, don't blame the Lord for how things turn out. Instead, God empowers us to align our lives with the mission of Jesus, to act in accord with our values – with Jesus' Gospel values – and to let loose of our anxieties about outcomes. In the Church, therefore, the ends never justify the means, and no situation exempts us from our responsibility to abide the model of the One who is God's great pleasure.

Faith in the Christ who heals the hurting, who welcomes the stranger and the outcast, allows us to live in hope, rather than despair; in abundance, rather than in scarcity; in love, rather than in fear. While we will not become either bulletproof or unsinkable, with faith in the Christ of God, we live in the joyful knowledge that we are loved: loveable and loved, every one of us and forever. With faith in this Beloved, we trust that we will never be left abandoned: God with us and with us, *always*. Therefore, we define ourselves by this Holy company we keep, and never by our struggles, those we choose or those that choose us. In the Church, the means *are our end* and our freedom, for we entrust outcomes to God's care, keeping, and fulfillment.

This morning as ever, then, we gather as the Body of Christ in a fretful world looking across uncertain horizons – horizons that will always remain uncertain. We see the storms that might come, yet, with the Kingdom of God at work in our hearts, you and I? Well, we set sail anyway. And with Jesus as our companion, we make our way to the other side ... *free*.^{xi}

In the name of God,
Amen.

ⁱ Green Day. "[Warning](#)" ([Music Video](#)). Francis Lawrence, Director. 2001.

ⁱⁱ Green Day. "Warning." *Warning*: Warner Brothers/Reprise Records, 2000. I learned of Green Day in the early '90s when I noticed their first album as a Lookout Records release. Lookout's superstars – Operation Ivy – were heroes and staples on mine and my friends' tape decks, and Green Day covered their "Knowledge," the fast-as-blazes opener on Operation Ivy's *Energy*. I invested in Green Day's independent-label stuff, but their mainstream debut (they once existed as opposition to that mainstream) felt more bratty than punk. To my surprise, they won me over a decade later with the 2004 release of *American Idiot*. A concept album and double-LP – almost always a curse upon a curse! – they managed to both rock and capture the deep disappointments of those American years. I remain a fan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 3:35.

^{iv} Mark 4:21.

^v Mark 4:33-34.

^{vi} Mark 4:35.

^{vii} Mark 1:11.

^{viii} Mark 4:41.

^{ix} I imagine instructions for laundering appear on the opposite side of this divine tag.

^x Mark 4:40.

^{xi} Declaring our freedom in God as the United States celebrates Juneteenth as a federal holiday this weekend.