

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 21, 2009

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Have you ever been so tossed about by the winds and storm of life that you've had to question your understanding of God; that you've had to renegotiate how you perceive and understood your own idea of God. I think it's safe to say that most of have. Most of us have had to do that at one time or another in our life. When was one of those times in your life? What was that experience like? My Uncle Joe and Aunt Sandi were recently visited by one of life's dark tempest you might say. On April fourth my Uncle Joe had a terrible cycling accident at the Velodrome in San Jose' in California. He's a former track and field coach, a retired commodities broker, a real historian of markets and veteran master cyclist. He'd already completed two races that day when on the third race there was a pile-up, a big crash right in front of him and there was no way that he could get out of the way. He went over the handlebars and landed on his face, suffered a whiplash injury to his neck. The injury ruptured vertebrae C three and four left him paralyzed in his arms and his legs. He's now in therapy and we hope that the paralysis is temporary, but the future for my Uncle Joe is far from certain. This tragedy has been incredibly difficult for my aunt and my uncle. But as I've watched them go through this; as I've watched them navigate this storm in their life, they've taught me a lot. My Aunt's practice has been to focus on the present moment, focus on the present moment and not to fear for the future because there's so much unknown and uncertain and out of our control. A practice doesn't make things easy necessarily. Each day is incredibly hard and tiring, but her practice does give her the openness of heart that she needs to find life amid the storm. So mid the very real limitations they now face, my aunt and my uncle have rediscovered the profound depth of the love they have for one another. They've learned savor little things. Each day they are filled with incredible gratitude for their friends, family, caregivers who have supported them along the way, encouraged them, walked with them and bear their burdens. My aunt and my uncle have taught me that we can redeem suffering, not by bitterly seeking answers to the inexplicable, but by opening our hearts to the mystery of life and by using life's storms, sometimes even tragedies as opportunities for our own spiritual maturity. Job who we hear about this morning, Job suffered inexplicably as the ancient tale recounts to us. Job and his so called friends throughout the chapters of the Book of Job wrestled for answers. What is the meaning of all this suffering, God? Yet in the end God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind and God offers only questions – questions and not answers. God does that not once, but twice. Job responds and wisely I think recognizes the limits of his own knowing. "I lay my hand on my mouth" he says. "I lay my hand on my mouth". I have spoken once, not twice, but I will proceed no further. Job is silent before the ineffable mystery of God, speechless before the inscrutable. Job realizes that God is sometimes more enigma than solution. God keeps us open and forever spiritually maturing and evolving and that growth is made possible by humility, not pride as Job reminds us. Jesus – Jesus has been teaching wisdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, calling disciples, speaking in parables and otherwise causing mischief, challenging assumptions, being harassed by the authorities, harangued by disbelievers and pursued by the

crowds. So on that day when evening had come, no wonder why he was dead tired when he got into the boat. And when he instructed the disciples to cross over to the other side to non-Jewish, to gentile territory, no wonder why he fell sound asleep on that cushion in the stern of the boat as they went out to sea. As it grows dark the winds whip up and toss that small boat about. There in the whirlwind and the waves the disciples become afraid and begin to fear for their lives so they rouse Jesus from his sleep and question his care for them. Teacher, do you care that we're perishing? How often do we question God's care for us when the storm is at its thickest? Yet in the midst of the storm Jesus says: "peace, peace, be still". Calm can come and still our stormy waters". The voice of Jesus asks us "why are you afraid? Have you faith?" Again, questions, not answers; questions that leave us with awe like the disciples; questions that draw us in and help us cross over from the closed place of fear to the way of the open heart. How often do we long to avoid the storms and tempests of life? How often do we long for God to protect us? But today's readings don't seem to give us quite that understanding of God, quite that picture or image of God, rather they seem to echo the refrain from that children's song. Do you remember it? Can't go over it; can't go under it; can't go around it; gotta go through it – gotta go through the storm. The readings seem to tell us that the storms will come and if we're open we can meet God in the midst of the storm. Perhaps God doesn't prevent the storms as we sometimes want God to. But God meets us in the storms and changes us, not by changing reality, but changing our perception and experience of reality. God is the transforming and reorienting presence. Like my aunt and uncle being present to the presence gives us the openness of heart to find life amid the storm and to cross over to the other side. Even if we do not understand, we do not need to fear. Yes, the winds may blow, the waves may toss, but there in the back of our boat is a sleeping presence that we can awake and like Job we may cover our mouth before the presence. We may find ourselves covering our mouth before the presence recognizing the limits of our own understanding, our words may come to an end and we may recognize that some things are inexplicable. Yet there always remains, always remains reverence and gratitude and open heartedness before the mystery of life. Why are we afraid?