

The Rev. Canon Mark E. Stanger
Sermon for June 24, 2018
Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

AND THEY SAID TO JESUS, “DON’T YOU CARE?”

Proper 7B – 24 June 2018

I Samuel 17:57—18:5, 10-16; Psalm 133; II Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

“He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’”

The noise and storms in our country’s life continued at gale force this week as we were unable to turn away from the faces and voices of families from other countries and cultures seeking refuge from places of violence and want, desiring a new life of productivity, safety and freedom.

Fears and passions all around about security, resources, fairness, rule of law, basic humanity, care for the most vulnerable, fear about “what we’ve become.”

Much of our information and emotion about these events were carried in persistent sights and sounds: images:

(1) a sea of crinkly, shiny blankets which we first had always associated with space travel, then as shoulder wraps for panting marathon runners, and now, universally and finally, with the shivering refugee plucked from the cold sea or their children, laid down to rest on the concrete floor of a sloughed-off shell of a dead Wal-Mart.

(2) The stunning image of an alleged adult sporting a sloppy \$39 jacket designed (what a word), no doubt, for the constantly replenished worldwide market of sullen pre-teens:
 “I really don’t care, do u?”

(3) And the audio image (can I say that?) of fearful and panicked cries of kids, ordinary kids in extraordinarily terrifying circumstances.

(4) And the noise and nonsense from other alleged adults — news anchors and panelists and politicians— shouting over each other to define what is true about these events and their consequences.

“Peace! Be still!”

What image keeps returning to you

and how does it inform

what you think about, feel about, believe about, and

if your answer to the jacket’s question is, “Well, yes, actually I do care, ” what you intend to *do about* this particular crisis, moment of judgment.

Besides all these and others,

two other small images remain with me.

(1) One commentator caught the frustrating absurdity of it for me, marveling and lamenting the impassioned “nitpicking about the precise meaning of a ‘cage.’” This is the level of discourse, debate and discussion to which we’ve descended.

(2) The second abiding image I have is also of a “designed” piece of clothing, a t-shirt.

Six years ago the very talented 31 year-old American singer, songwriter, rapper, record producer and photographer

Frank Ocean

broke the rigid rules of Hip-Hop music culture by revealing on his Tumblr blog that his life’s first and most significant love had been with another man.

A commentator in that field bypassed the old predictable knee-jerk response of disavowal and prediction of a career tanking.

Instead he wrote:

“Today is a big day for hip-hop.

It is a day that will define who we really are.

How compassionate will we be?

How loving can we be?

How inclusive are we?”

Frank Ocean showed up at a notable summer music festival a year ago wearing a message on a t-shirt *he* had designed:

*Why be racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic
when you could just be quiet?*

[“Peace! Be still!”]

Someone this week suggested adding, “Why be xenophobic, or Islamophobic ... when you could just *be quiet?*”

Followers of Jesus may be called to imitate him
and to silence destructive or false clamors and claims
and to call forth some peace:

No, it’s simply not true

that violent crime is increasing or even significant
in immigrant populations.

No, we will not be swayed by charged terms like “infest”
or disgraceful references to groups of people being called “animals.”

Because, yes, we really do care.

We will speak out, witness for, and engage in hard debate
about assessing challenging situations
and struggling for policies and practices

to resolve challenges in our shared life on this planet.

In this case, a recent study

(from the UN, six months ago, I have the reference)

there are now an estimated 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth —

3.4% of the world's inhabitants today are international migrants.

Less than two years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted

the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*,

in which Member States agreed to implement

well-managed migration policies.

They also committed to sharing more equitably

the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting

the world's refugees, protecting the human rights of all migrants, and countering xenophobia and intolerance directed towards migrants. ...

“Reliable data and evidence are critical to combat misperceptions about migration and to inform migration policies”

Reliable sources of our faith and hope and just what we stand for are critical as well:

“They took him with them in the boat, just as he was.”

No armed king or superhero, no demagogue

but the good shepherd who would one day be the gentle lamb led to slaughter.

Jesus, “just as he was,” accompanies us

through every dark storm or encounter with systemic evil fueled by fear.

His weapon and method are a creative, healing word: “Peace! Be still!”

St. Paul’s announces this morning:

“Now is the day of salvation

Now is the acceptable time.”

For what?

To define who we really are.

To ask: “How compassionate will we be?

How loving can we be? How inclusive are we?”

If Hip-Hop can do it,

maybe our citizenry, our press, and our leaders can do it.

Personal life circumstances, and the challenges facing

our city, our great nation, and the global community

are almost overwhelming.

“A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat,

so that the boat was already being swamped. ...They woke him up...

Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Yes, I do care.

“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?

Get to work.

Set sail, keep rowing,

silence the storms and the demons,

and bring some peace and decency and refreshment.

