

Dignity Boston
Homily – 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B – Peggy Hayes
June 24, 2018
St. Stephen’s Church, 419 Shawmut Ave, Boston

“A fierce gale arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat so much that it was almost swamped.”

This story of a terrifying storm surrounding the followers of Jesus is found in scripture, and in our imagination, and, also in art.

There’s a famous Rembrandt 1633 painting entitled “Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee” that depicts this dramatic moment. The boat is pitched by the storm at a dangerous angle, enormous waves are crashing over it, the figures in the painting are hauling on sails and ropes and gripping the gunwales of the boat, their faces show terror and shock. Jesus, at the center of the scene, is serene and seems lit from within. Everyone is dressed in the style of the working people of the 17th century Dutch republic. Rembrandt’s message is **“this is happening now.”** Not a historical event recorded in a book, but the reality of the human experience, in every time.

And Christ is in the center of it all with us, present amidst the terror, the seasickness, and the nearness of death. He is there, ready to rebuke the wind and sea.

I think we're in the storm right now. Like so many, I can't stop thinking about what is happening in our country and world – the separation of children from their parents, the assault on civil rights, the environment, our justice system, the press, and the oppression of the most vulnerable members of our society.

And, this is happening as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community marks what has become, by consensus, the biggest anniversary in our movement – the commemoration of the events at the Stonewall Inn in New York, 49 years ago this weekend. It has become commonplace to say that three nights of riots after a violent police raid of a dumpy little bar on a side street in Greenwich Village sparked the modern gay rights movement. But it wasn't three nights of throwing rocks and bottles and pennies at the police and voila! – we have same sex marriage

and gay straight alliances in schools and out LGBTQI judges and mayors and teachers and doctors and actors.

It wasn't a straight line from marginalized people pushing back on public authorities on a hot night in June, because they had simply grown so tired of the mistreatment of the mafia bar owners and the police, to the freedom we enjoy now. It wasn't a straight line from Stonewall to our families dancing to "Love Shack" at our weddings. There were a million setbacks and heartaches and crushing tragedies on this road – our people endured storm after storm – and they kept going. I believe the Holy Spirit is present in every moment of our liberation movement -- Jesus at the center of the storm.

When the storm on the Sea of Galilee abated and the followers of Jesus got back to land, I imagine them stepping out of the boat shaken by the experience, but also changed by it – confirmed, strengthened and inspired by it. We know that they stepped into the future of their mission – following Jesus and witnessing his death and resurrection, telling his story for the

liberation of all people, doing their part to bring justice and light to the darkest places of the human experience.

After the riots ended, the heroes and sheroes of Stonewall gathered up the resources they needed to create a movement.

They already possessed these resources inside themselves -- inspiration, creativity, grit, humor and intelligence and their *refusal to quit*. Most of all, they were in it for **more than**

themselves. They, and the people they inspired, built a movement on the principle of the power of community, the power of numbers:

-One LGBTQI person walking the down the street is a target

-one thousand LGBTQI people *taking* the street – that’s a movement

That’s a movement that invites people to push through their fears and step off the curb and join the march that frees us all.

Collective Power in Collective Action

My liberation is bound up in yours.

We will free each other.

As my mother says sometimes when we're about to hang up the phone – I'll pray for you and you pray for me.

Our freedom today is rooted in the Stonewall and Dignity pioneers who made our lives today what they are.

There's a great collection online of the posters for Stonewall commemorations in New York.

<https://gaycenter.org/archives/>

The first year of the march– 1970 – the poster read: “Wake Up!” Christopher Street Liberation Day”

In 1973, the poster reads “The Christopher Street Liberation Day '73 march **proudly** assembles at 11 am...”

In 1976, the commemorative magazine that was created for Stonewall repeats these words around the border like a mantra: Unity, Unity, Unity...

In 1978, it was billed as a “Gay Walk for Freedom” and a “Gay-In on the Great Lawn of Central Park”

In 1979, the poster read “Stonewall was a Riot! We won with Gay Power!”

In 1980, the theme was “Building a Stronger Community for Ourselves”

In 1985 it was “You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet!”

In 1990 – Our Voices – Families, Friends and Lovers

As Paul says in the second reading tonight – “From now on, we do not look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment. Anyone who is in Christ is a **new creation**. The old order has passed away; now everything is new.”

The old order *has* passed away – the living should live no longer simply for themselves. There’s strength and liberation in community, across time, generations and geography. People we have never met made our lives more free, more whole, more safe, more joyful, more proud, and, I believe, more in

touch with our own place in the beloved of God. I am deeply humbled by this legacy, and I believe the only way we can respond is to own our role in the liberation of others, as Christ does for us in the center of the storm.

The wind and the rain and the storm on the Sea of Galilee threatened everyone alike, and the wind was hushed for all. Let's live more deeply in that metaphor. Because everything I have glimpsed of the divine tells me that this is true – we're all in it together – the family in Puerto Rico waiting for electricity, the family separated at the border, every person who is desperate, frightened, in danger, ill or alone. That's the universal experience of humanity -- as are joy, security, fulfillment, respect and belonging. Our liberation is bound up in each other's.

When we're in the storm, we can contemplate the Gospel or the painting, Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee. The painting is not at the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum

anymore – it was stolen in 1990 – but we can look at it online and see Christ at the center of the storm and imagine what happens next, to the disciples, and to us.