



## ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

Pentecost - 3B (Proper 7) – June 25, 2006

Job 38:1-11; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

---

### "WE ARE THE CHURCH"

Jesus is asleep! Right there! On the back pew! Jesus is asleep right there on the back pew in this church! Thought you might like to know . . . . Those of you who are "at home" back there . . . . And those of us who sometimes sleep in church . . . .

Jesus is sleeping. There on the back pew. In this ship of the Church. Just as He was sleeping on the cushion in the stern in the ship of the Church in this morning's Gospel lesson.

Jesus is sleeping, not because He is "sleep-deprived" as many modern people are; not because He "partied too hearty" the night before, as we sometimes do; not because He is lazy or indifferent or does not care about the fate of His disciples in that ship of the Church or in this ship of the Church. No. Jesus is sleeping because Jesus is at peace in the storm! Jesus is sleeping because He **IS** the peace in the midst of the storm and the darkness! Jesus is sleeping because Jesus is the peace which surpasses all human understanding, the perfect peace which the world can neither give nor take away. And Jesus is sleeping here in this church to bring us this peace in all things. "A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat so that the boat was already being swamped . . . but Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion . . . !"

Today is a "homecoming" of sorts. Some say that's a Baptist term. Or a Southern term. I prefer to think of it as a Christian term. We Christians know that "our commonwealth is in heaven," that we have no lasting home except here – with Christ – that the world of Word and Sacrament in here is often closer to Christ than the world out there . . . . This congregation, this ship of the Church, has been that home for many through the past 58 years . . . and it will become home for many more in the years yet to come . . . . This fourth Sunday in June, 2006, the coming together of this anniversary and this Gospel text and this year's Gospel Express VBS which begins tomorrow morning and the day-to-day life and ministry of the Church in the world which goes on anniversary or not – invite us to consider the Church and St. Michael Lutheran Church, Greenville, SC, as a SHIP, a TRAIN, and a HOSPITAL!

This church called St. Michael's is a ship, a vessel carefully constructed to be IN the world without being OF the world – a construction which makes it possible for us to live and work and play in an alien environment. The raging storm on the small Sea of Galilee in Mark's Gospel text is an extreme and vivid example. You know the storms in your life. I know the storms in my life. Thus we understand the Church as a good ship! What we may not understand so easily is that a ship is a very small universe – when you're at sea, you either have it, or make it, or you do without it – and the colony of those who live in her becomes a very inter-dependent community.

This church called St. Michael's is also a train. Trains are "missional machines." Trains exist to move people and products from one place to another place. Trains serve no useful purpose sitting in the yard. Train cars need to be re-arranged, loaded and unloaded and made up into a train. But a train is not really a train until it moves out from the station and begins to accomplish its mission! And the Church is not really the Church until it moves out from the station and begins to accomplish its mission of moving you and me and those with us here on Augusta Road to a new place! That means the Church is about change. Even though we don't like change, we will see the world differently, and more of it, because we are on this moving train called the Church.

This church called St. Michael's is also a hospital. Not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. Not a collection of legalists, not a den of perfectionists, not a service center for the self-righteous, but a hospital. A place of birth! A place of health and healing and wholeness! A place of restoring us to home! And from time to time a place of new birth into our heavenly home! The Church is a hospital. This church is a hospital. Because Jesus is here. Sleeping on the back pew. So that we can wake Him whenever we need Him. Because the peace of God comes always from outside ourselves. Comes always from Christ to us. Because we always need this peace.

Jesus is sleeping, there on the back pew! That's great good news for those of us who are anxious about this church having enough money, having enough faith, having enough courage, to grow and to thrive as an effective mid-size congregation in a large-church community here in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This church called St. Michael's is all three – a ship, a train, a hospital – because Jesus Christ is all three! We **are** the Church! We remember well and celebrate today the times this church has been for us a ship, a train, and a hospital! We look ahead to and give thanks for the times it will again be a ship, a train, a hospital – because we remember those not yet here, just as 58 years ago we were not yet here, and realize that we are, in fact, here for them!

We are the Church! We are tempted always to be something else – because it is often far easier for us to be something else.

But Christ our Lord keeps on insisting that WE ARE THE CHURCH! That St. Michael's **is** the CHURCH!

Because He has constructed us with His Cross!

AMEN