

**YOU ARE INVITED**  
**B. HULL SOMERS – BLC – 6.24.18**

***Job 38:1-11, 2 Cor. 6:1-13, Mark 4:35-41***

It is officially summertime in the Pacific Northwest, which means it is party time. We, here in the furthest corner of the continental United States, cannot simply have an outdoor event in March or go on a walk without being rained on in November. When the sun is out and the rain clouds are mostly gone we must take full advantage. We are obligated to not waste one ounce of sunshine – our February selves would slap us if we did. Thus, I have been receiving invitations for engagement parties, birthday soirees, and backyard BBQs at a considerable pace.

This morning's texts remind me of an invitation. In our epistle, Paul implores the church at Corinth to open wide their hearts – an invitation to life in Christ.

The rest of the invitation does not sound so grand.

I don't know about you but the kinds of invitations I like to receive say things like water front and bacon burgers and open bar. They do not say things like afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonment, riots, labors, sleepless nights, or hunger.

I do NOT want to go to that party. RSVP, no!

And yet, this is part of what Paul invites the church to in his invitation to open wide their hearts.

It is not so different from Jesus. The disciples found this out time and time again. Today's Gospel text is a perfect example. The disciples were unwittingly invited to a three hour tour with Jesus. They accepted, although they should have known better, and drama ensued.

Let us be clear, this was not exaggerated drama. This was not hyperbole. This was not, as they say, fake news.

I am not a seasoned boater so when I am out kayaking and things get choppy, my heart lurches a bit.

The disciples, on the other hand, spent their entire lives on the water. As fishermen they were not easily frightened by waves or storms. They would not have been nervous by a little chop. Even a bad storm would only turn on their professional skills and allow them to navigate without too much hardship. The fact that the disciples, seasoned and experienced on the water, were terrified and thought they might die means that this storm was bad. Really bad.

Not only was Jesus unaffected by the water the boat was taking on from the storm, he was actually taking a nap throughout it all.

There is calm and then there is CALM. I have known people who can be relaxed through a lot but I cannot imagine anyone having the ability to sleep through a near shipwreck.

These seasoned fishermen who had been doing everything within their training to keep the boat afloat finally realized Jesus was asleep. I can only imagine what they thought, “are you kidding me? There is no way he is asleep right now.”

They woke him up and implored him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing right now?” We are dying, this is not a drill, DO SOMETHING!!!

I imagine that Jesus yawned, stretched a little and then spoke – in what the text says was “rebuking the sea” – peace! Be still!

And the sea was calm. Dead calm. Nothing moved.

Jesus asked them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

As a human being, I think I can safely assume that most of us do not like to feel out of control. And yet, that is precisely what we are invited to in opening our hearts to this Jesus – who slept through storms, embraced the untouchable, spoke truth to power, and died a humiliating common criminal's death.

We are invited to give up control and certainty and feel as though the ship is taking on water, and there is nothing we can do about it. Like the only one who can stop it is asleep.

Our texts this morning proclaim this alarming invitation that spans from Job – the most unfortunate man in the Biblical canon, to Paul's hardships, calamities and riots, to a near death experience on the open water.

Open wide your hearts.

This is the gift of the Good News. It is not an impossible word to a people duped into submission. It is an invitation to the upside down Kingdom. The Kingdom that does not give us a cloak of invisibility to pain and hardship but rather accompanies us on the journey. The upside down Kingdom that allows us, whether in hardship or joy, to proclaim God's goodness. The Kingdom that makes null and void any message that would separate us from one another or God. The Kingdom that is ruled by the One who defied the laws and regulations of oppression and injustice and showed us a new way – a way paved with grace, motivated by love and drenched in peace.

It is an invitation to the terrifying release of control but it is also an invitation to pure and true goodness. As Paul writes it is full of purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God – in all circumstances.

That is an invitation to new life in Jesus.

Open wide your hearts.

Henry Nouwen describes this new life in the following way: “It reveals new priorities, directions, and gifts from God. We come to realize that what previously seemed so important for our lives loses its power over us. Our desire to be successful, well liked and influential becomes increasingly less important as we move closer to God’s heart. To our surprise, we even may experience a strange inner freedom to follow a new call or direction as previous concerns move into the background of our consciousness. We begin to see the beauty of the small and hidden life that Jesus lived in Nazareth. Most rewarding of all is the discovery that as we pray more each day, God’s will—that is, God’s concrete ways of loving us and our world—gradually is made known to us.”

This invitation holds for us the opportunity to know that the hardships that we experience are not wasted nor some cosmic punishment because we have sinned but instead an integrated part of life that is good – joy and pain, blessing and loss, victories and failures, friends and haters. We get to proclaim the goodness of belonging to God every day – when the storms rage and when the waters are calm. An invitation to life abundant.

And as we do, we can know that we are not finished yet. We are not finished until this upside down Kingdom has claimed the entire created world. Where children and families are safe no matter what man-made border they cross, where we can hold the hands of the dying with confident hope, where we proclaim God’s wide welcome with boldness to those who have been hurt by the church, where we are able to forgive our enemies and bless those who curse us...we have work to do. Open wide your hearts.

You are invited. To live in the love and grace of Jesus that has been poured out over your life without reservation.

You are invited to open wide your hearts. Amen.

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