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HOW SCRIPTURE WORKS - EVEN IN YOUNG FOLKS  
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Now, Jesus had been teaching the crowds about the kingdom of God, all during a long day. Gathered there on the shore of the lake, the crowd pushed at him, so he got in a boat, rowed out a little bit, and taught from there. At the end of the day, Jesus said, "Let's row on over to the other side." And having spoken all day, he fell asleep. Jesus was plain worn out for the time being. Teaching and speaking take it out of you, having to be "on" and aware and present and available for others.

Out on the water, however, a storm came up - Jesus evidently was so tired that he slept right through it. But his disciples sailing the boat began to freak out and worry about being swamped, capsizing, drowning. As Jesus slept on, the one whom they were following, the one who had done miracles in their sight, they finally shook him awake and asked, "Don't you care that we're about to perish?????" They could've said that better, showed some faith and trust, like, "Hey Jesus, we need you to do your miracle thing here for us." But instead, they questioned even his caring for their situation. They felt abandoned.

Jesus wakes up and immediately says those words, "Peace, be still" that got made into a hymn that my sister and I used to do as a duet for our home church when we were teenagers. Anyway, everything immediately calmed down storm-wise, and Jesus asked the disciples why they had been afraid - didn't they have faith? But the disciples who had seen Jesus do so much already, were amazed all over again that Jesus could even speak storms away.

I remember this being a story told in Vacation Bible School when I was young - I tried to figure out how young..... in my memory, it happened in the top floor of our education wing, around one of those heavy old long tables dotted with glitter and glue and paint from many Sunday School and VBS projects. The top floor was where the Primary grades met, so I was in 1st, 2nd or 3rd grade. We had no air conditioning, but as a kid I didn't really feel it like I do now - it was just summer.

I still remember sitting there with a piece of manila paper in front of me, a large-ish paint brush, and several colors of Tempera paint in little dishes between me and the other kids. You remember how that smells? I guess we were being invited to paint the scene. I drew a little boat with guys in it, then started on the water. Imagining what it must have been like to be caught out in a storm, I started trying to paint swirling waves breaking around the boat and maybe into the boat; then I got into the hard gusts of wind blowing in the dark, stormy sky. I was swirling my brush and swirling my brush; I couldn't stop swirling my brush as I began to

identify with the fears and the panic of those guys on the roiling water, the feelings of being abandoned to the elements while God seemed to sleep and no one was fixing it. I got lost in the story and the feelings, and was shocked when the teacher said, "Time to clean up." I'd been transported to that day of waves and wind and storm - and I've remembered it ever since.

I wondered why that story caught me so much, why of all the Sunday School and Vacation Bible School stories I heard, that this story hit me and transported me. So I thought about what was going on in my young life around that age...When I was 5, my second sister was born, and named after our two favorite babysitters, Pat and Susie - her name was Patricia Sue, and we called her Susie. During my first grade year, Susie was really sick, and tension was high at our house. Santa came to our house, and people brought casseroles; I saw my mom cry for the first time. So I think as a result of all the tension, I caught the measles and had the worst case my doctor had ever seen, had a high fever that burned my hair at the scalp line, and it all broke off. I had to go back to school virtually bald. Susie was in and out of the hospital with a genetic disorder, and didn't survive. The story my parents told was that she died 2 weeks before my dad's birthday - duh, my own birthday was 10 days before my dad's. I remember that Mom couldn't make cupcakes for my class that year, and I had to take store-bought candy bars. My 1st grade year was tumultuous. And for the next 10 + years, I was always sick on my birthday. The summer after my birthday, I broke down in church one Sunday and cried through the whole service, thinking about heaven and hell and God and Jesus and death and life. In my home church, I was told that I'd had a conviction experience and should go forward to be baptized. So I came back to evening worship (we always did anyway), sat near the front so I wouldn't have to walk so far in front of people, and went forward. The next week I was baptized and became a full member of the church. I was 7, and just finished 1st grade.

No wonder the story of the storm captured me. Those swirling waves and howling winds were my fears of things being out of control in my home, the turbulence of the high levels of tension - that story was my life at 7 years old. The Bible story told me my story - and told me that even these disciples who were with Jesus, JESUS, got scared, too. And that Jesus took care of it by saying, "Peace, Be Still." Jesus was able to deal with it all, and calmed it. Jesus looked at them and me and asked, "Why are you afraid? I'm here. Have faith." I wanted that peace, that faith, that safety.

Last week we talked about not despising small things, small churches, small efforts, small gifts, and the effects of teaching our young, small people. We don't know what long-term impact our God-inspired actions will have. The VBS teachers who poured out the Tempera paint colors and distributed the manila paper for that art activity probably never dreamed that

the Scripture would grip one of the students there so much that she would remember it her whole life, and that God would use that day's story to encourage a little girl to trust God with that trauma at home.

When we baptized these young girls today, we promised to do all we could to raise them in the knowledge and love of Christ Jesus. Friends, the stories in the Scriptures are fuel for God's Spirit to WORK in lives, young as well as old. Maybe I didn't always pay the best attention to sermons - I remember looking at the illustrations in my Bible, or reading the words of hymns after I learned to read. The characters of the stories, in their encounters with God and faith, became friends and archetypes in my mind, stories to draw on as I lived and experienced life. They were my companions along the way. I grew up pasting cotton balls on David's sheep and using my whole Crayola box on Joseph's coat of many colors, singing about how deep and wide God's love is, and how Jesus loves the little children. That stuff doesn't leave you, nor does the patience of teachers who led in our little craft projects, nor the grandma and grandpa folks who talked to me kindly, nor when our babysitter got married and gave me a little apron and told me to make sure the bowl of mints stayed full during the reception. Watching how the adults around me prayed and lived, helped form my faith. Even if I'd later embraced a different faith, I had those stories and that love in the background.

What we share with our children matters. Our promises to raise them to know and love Jesus Christ matter to what kind of a person our children grow up to be. Yes, they will ponder other ways and make their own decisions - yet they will always have the grounding of faith and trust, they will always have the characters and the stories for the Spirit to use as they confront the challenges of their generation.

Yes, the Holy Spirit can work without this kind of upbringing, and it's never too late to learn the stories and meet the characters in the Scripture. God's Spirit works with us where we are, and at the level of brain development or emotional development that we're at. The stories that were preserved speak at many levels, even unconscious levels. And arts and crafts aren't just time-fillers - the Spirit can touch us in our deepest places as we paint, write, build, dance, sing and other more right-brain activities. We both learn facts and we learn affect, emotional impact, formation of our souls. It's important to be in the community of church.

My older son began to complain about Sunday School somewhere around age 11. It didn't help that a couple of his friends lived near the church parking lot and we could hear them in their pool as we got out of the car to go inside... He said that all they did in Sunday School was to yet again color the animals going into the ark, and everyone knew it never happened anyway. I was telling this to a colleague, and he said, "Don't you love it when they get to that

age???!” Actually, I was kind of taken aback when my sons said that. I said a quick prayer for grace and remembered that he was studying civilizations in school; I didn’t want to slap him down - he was asking for help thinking of Scripture in a new way because his brain was developing and asking questions about the literal way he’d heard the stories taught. We got a popsicle and talked about the way the symbol of the ark has captured the imagination of many cultures, a safe port in a storm, a preservation; and that many cultures had flood stories in their past. It’s a story of God preserving life, and God’s dissatisfaction with evil behaviors, as that’s not the best way to be human we were created to be. Children not only grow in body, they grow in knowledge and thinking and reasoning, in emotional maturity, in relational maturity- we can’t be afraid of that; we have to do our own growth and be prepared. We can’t avoid the harder conversations as they grow up and ask things, or catch us in our own places of inconsistency. Because they’ll do it! And how we respond to them makes a big difference.

God’s words don’t return empty - they accomplish what God desires, even if we don’t understand what’s happening. Certainly at 7 years old I had no idea of connecting the story of the storm to my life situation, and reflecting on it in that way. I just swirled my brush and felt the feelings without the knowledge of what was happening. The Holy Spirit used those words to do something in me anyway - to reassure, to find comfort in the words “Peace, be still,” to call me to trust...it spoke to me, and has stuck in my faith memory to this day.

Let us remember our promises, and keep them for these youngest new members brought into this family of faith. AMEN.