

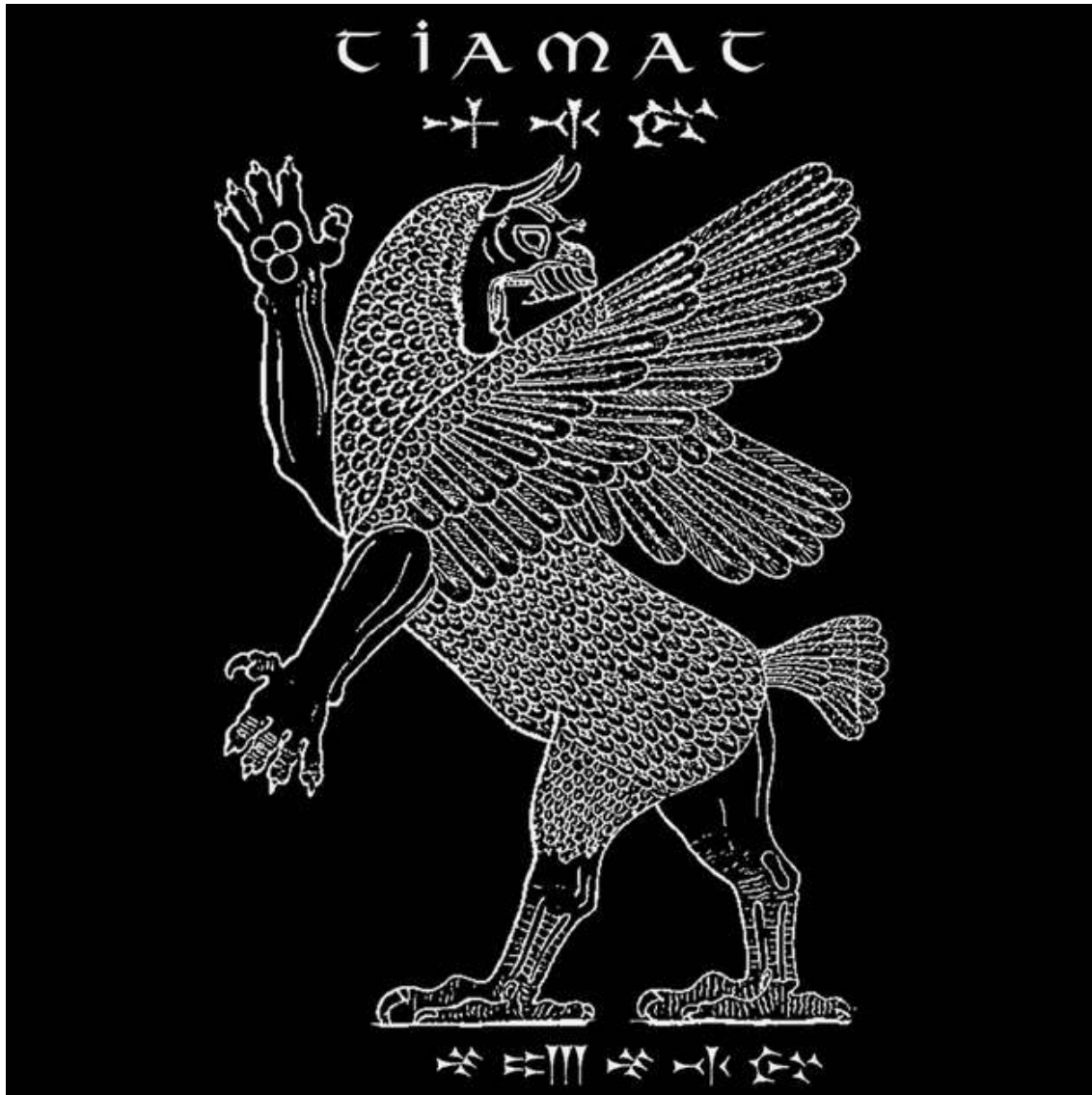
St. Mary's Episcopal Church

August 13, 2023

Message by Rev. Michael Burke

Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33 Burke

THE TAMING OF



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Good morning. Let's begin with a simple versicle and response. It comes from the Isaiah Chapter 58 passage of scripture that we used in our small group Bible reflection yesterday morning.

I will say "*I cry for help*" And you respond with the "Lord's part", that is "*here - I am.*"

Not that you are individually the Lord, but taking seriously the notion that we are collectively, the Body of Christ in the world.

Let's try it:

V: "I cry for help"

R: "Here - I am"

Again (repeat)

I have no idea of we are going to need that or not; we'll see where this all goes...

"Forrest," I yelled. "I'm losing the battle." I can't keep up!"

I swallowed hard and fought to keep my own sense of panic from overwhelming me.

An hour earlier, we had set out in a small boat in Katchemak Bay, off the coast of Homer, Alaska. It was a sunny Spring day, with a light breeze.

Now, here we were, being pushed further and further from shore by the strong icy, frigid winds, which seemingly, had come out of nowhere. The sea was swelling, and the waves were crashing over the side of the small boat the four us were in. I was on my hands and knees in the bottom of the boat, bailing frantically with all that we had at hand: a flimsy plastic sour cream container that held, at best, a quart of water.

With each wave, the water on the bottom of the boat grew deeper, and the boat rode lower in the water. And with each inch we sunk, the more water poured over the side with every ensuing wave.

Forrest was working the small motor as hard as he could, but the wind cancelled out any progress we were making. Nancy was bailing with her cupped hands, trying her best to help. Jen was moving about like the wild woman she is- shifting her weight so the side of the boat would ride up against the next incoming wave, careful not to overcompensate and spill us all into the 36 degree water.

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I saw the shore, off in the distance, getting further and further away. There was not another boat in sight. We were alone with the wind, the water, and the waves. And the sickening sinking feeling in my gut.

V: "I cry for help"

R: "Here - I am" (3X)

Pause. Just hit pause on that, because the Gospel is about to drop into a similar scene.

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The disciples are in a boat. At night. on Lake Gennesaret, or Yam Kinneret.. Its also called the Sea of Galilee, or sometimes, the Sea of Tiberias. Sitting some 700 feet below sea level, it's the lowest freshwater lake in the world and the second lowest after the Dead Sea. It is flanked by steep ridges, and the winds come suddenly off the Golan Heights, catch in the valley and mix and swirl unpredictably on the lake.

It's eight miles across and waves have been recorded on the lake in excess of twenty feet. With the equipment available in Jesus' time, the crossing was as much as two hours depending on the wind.

And here are the disciples. Jesus has just fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish, then sent the disciples across the lake while Matthew tells us Jesus went upon the mountainside to pray.

If you don't recall preaching on this passage from Matthew, it only comes around once in a while. And its parallel, in Mark's Gospel doesn't appear anywhere in the revised common lectionary three year cycle for Sundays. We often conflate it with another story we heard in worship, in which Jesus is *in* the boat when the storm picks up. It has another direct parallel, in **John 6**. Whereas Mark is customarily direct, long on immediacy and short on specifics, Matthew and John provide additional detail.

They were three to four miles out from shore when the storm struck them. The disciples are *terrified*, which something for the fishermen among them. They cried out in fear.

V: "I cry for help"

R: "Here - I am" 3x

I am, said Jesus. Be not afraid.

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There is a lot of backstory to the story that preachers often don't have the time to take and to tell.

The ancient world, seemed to those who lived in it, to be governed by powerful forces, and it was not coterminous with Hebrew culture. ..There is what many scholars believe is an *older story*.

In the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian epic of creation, Tiamat is the symbol of the chaos of primordial creation. Tiamat is described as “the glistening one,” and it was Tiamat who brought forth the first dragons and whose body was integrated into the heavens and the earth. Sailors in the ancient near east ascribed storms at sea to Tiamat’s power, and Tiamat was held by folklore to be the most powerful of the gods and goddesses.

The disciples at this point in the synoptic gospels, are just beginning to realize something of who Jesus is. But what are the limits of his power and the transformation he brings? Earlier, in **Mark 4 and Matthew chapter 8**, Jesus calms the storm and the disciples ask, who is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” Whose voice indeed, calms even Tiamot, the O.G. Chaos Monster, whose very body, in the folklore of old, gave rise to the world? Who *is* this man, Jesus, they ask?



*A contemporary rendering of Tiamat by Cassie Kitching.
Available at: <https://www.redbubble.com/shop/ap/28394113>*

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Traditionally, preachers from time immemorial have drawn from this passage a message that we must have faith in Jesus. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, not on the wind. That is well and fine and good.

And we live in turbulent times. We have a former President of the United States and front runner for his party's nomination under indictment. Never have we been so polarized as a nation. We have a war on the Eastern flank of Europe. Africa is starving for grain. We have record deaths of those who are without homes, on the streets of our city. The upper Yukon has no fish. Parts of the country are literally burning up. Life and the planet are changing.

And I haven't even mentioned the turbulence of our own individual and personal lives.

Storms, storms, storms.

I have sat across from so many folks over the past few months at various times and occasions, I keep watching, reading the faces. I can see the weariness, the stress, the perseverance. It was then, in the midst of one of those moments of watching people, that the experience on Katchemak Bay came back to me. The heart pumping with adrenaline. Uncertainty of the timing of the next wave or its height. The fight to keep bailing, bailing, bailing. The seeming futility against the enormity of it all.

Racism, sexism, homophobia, fatigue, violence, abuse. Cosmic powers of evil that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.. The storms rage on.

And in the midst of it all -chaos! Every time we stop to take a breath, chaos. Very little makes sense. A nation and culture divided against itself. Reasonable people have lost their minds. Hope floats, they say, but say, "sometimes, and just barely."

Tiamat, our old friend, we meet again. Chaos-in-slow-motion, everywhere we look, layered in fatigue. We are sometimes overwhelmed. We are sometimes exhausted. And strangely, we are sometimes simply bored.

The American novelist Tom Robins once wrote: "the problem is that Western civilization [is] declining too fast for comfort, but too slowly to be very exciting."

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But let me leave you with this:

Even before the fish and the cross were symbols of early Christianity, was the boat. The boat was one of our earliest symbols of life shared in Christ, life together as beloved community. And that's us, right? WE

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are the boat! Take a moment and look at the shape of the altar in this place. Unusual, isn't it. It's a boat. I felt the presence of being together every week. In this boat. There are people in this room that I would trust with my very life – and willingly ride out any storm with, any time, and any place they asked me to.

And for reasons which perhaps go far beyond our understandings, we were called into this boat, together. You and I. We share a sacred bond in the risen Christ.

I know.... There are those of us who feel inadequate for the crossing of the waters. There are times it seems the shore is receding from view, and we stand against the rage of the winds. But know that...

YOU were called. YOU, the beloved. YOU, in ways about which we can only marvel and wonder.

I don't mind the times when we are fishing. I love the fishing. The quiet one-on-one conversations with someone in which we both feel the hushed movement of the Holy Spirit and know that God's hope can change the course of our lives. Tiny, holy glimpses, where we see what is to come – the day when hope wins, love endures, and justice rolls down like a mighty stream. Fishing feeds my soul.

But in the Gospels... when the boat is not pictured as seeking and surfacing fish, it is in the midst of storms.

It's the storms that make me shake. At least weekly, and sometimes even daily, I panic and want to swim to shore, but the water always seems too wide and the winds too strong.

And in the Gospels, Jesus walks through the storm on the surface of the sea. He dances in the dragon's jaws, and calms even the primordial chaos that lies at the birth-heart of creation.

And then he holds out his hand to us and gently beckons, "Come!"

Somewhere in the midst of Katchemak Bay, I learned that truth, that Christ is with us always.

Somewhere off the coast of Homer, I met Tiamat. Tiamat rages, Tiamat blows, Tiamat usually scares me, but also makes me smile a wary smile. Somehow, through the years, we have learned to become friends. And I've learned something I'll share on another day, something that is true for me, at least. Tiamat needs to be tamed, not slain.

And somewhere close by, almost always, skipping on a glittering wave, is an even older friend of mine, who brought me to shore. When I see him... and when I can't:

V: "I cry for help"

R: "Here - I am"

“According to Job, the dragon Behemoth was in the Waters and received the Jordan into his jaws. Now, since the heads of the dragon must be broken, Jesus, having gone down into the Waters, bound the Strong One, so that we should have the power to walk on scorpions and snakes.”⁴ ... “Just as Noah had confronted the Sea of Death in which sinful humanity had been destroyed, and emerged from it, so the newly baptized man descends into the baptismal piscina to confront the Water Dragon in a supreme combat from which he emerges victorious.”

- *Cyril of Jerusalem, c. 313-386 CE*

In the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation myth, the God Marduk transforms Tiamat's body into the world.



Contemporary rendering of Tiamat, courtesy of: <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-asia/tiamat-mesopotamia-0010565>

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to August 10



Proper 14, Year A, RCL

The Collect

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 58:1-11

False and True Worship

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,

to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me

and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness

and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgements,

they delight to draw near to God.

‘Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,

and oppress all your workers.

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today

will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose,

a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,

and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,

a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
 to undo the thongs of the yoke,
 to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke?
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover them,
 and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up quickly;
 your vindicator shall go before you,
 the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
 you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Psalm 85:8-13

8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, *
 for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
 and to those who turn their hearts to him.
 9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, *
 that his glory may dwell in our land.
 10 Mercy and truth have met together; *
 righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
 and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
 12 The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, *
 and our land will yield its increase.
 13 Righteousness shall go before him, *
 and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

The Epistle - Romans 10:5-15

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

“The word is near you,
 on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew

and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

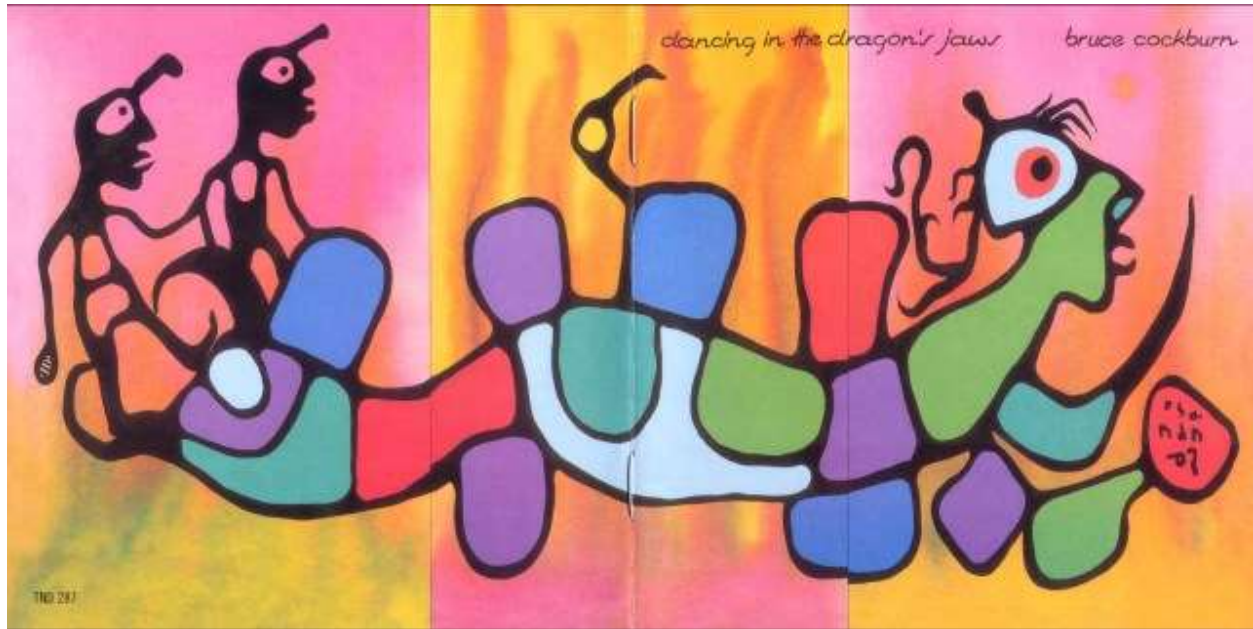
But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

The Gospel - Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Today's playlist:



Art by Ojibwe artist ᑕᑭᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ (Copper Thunderbird, a.k.a Norval Morrisseau),
Copyright © 1958 – 2023 The Estate of Norval Morrisseau

Creation Dream

words and music by Bruce Cockburn

[Verse 1]

Centered on silence
Counting on nothing
I saw you standing on the sea
And everything was
Dark except for
Sparks the wind struck from your hair
Sparks that turned to
Wings around you
Angel voices mixed with seabird cries
Fields of motion
Surging outward
Questions that contain their own replies

[Verse 2]

You were dancing
I saw you dancing
Throwing your arms toward the sky
Fingers opening
Like flares
Stars were shooting everywhere
Lines of power
Bursting outward
Along the channels of your song
Mercury waves flashed
Under your feet
Shots of silver in the shell-pink dawn

Hills of Morning,

Words and music by Bruce Cockburn

[Verse 1]

Underneath the mask of the sulfur sky
 A bunch of us were busy waiting
 Watching the people looking ill at ease
 Watching the fraying rope get closer to
 breaking

[Verse 2]

Women and men moved back and forth
 In between effect and cause
 And just beyond the range of normal sight
 This glittering joker was dancing in the
 dragon's jaws

[Chorus]

Let me be a little of your breath
 Moving over the face of the deep
 I want to be a particle of your light
 Flowing over the hills of morning

[Verse 3]

The only sign you gave of who you were
 When you first came walking down the road
 Was the way the dust motes danced around
 Your feet in a cloud of gold

[Verse 3]

But everything you see's not the way it
 seems
 Tears can sing and joy shed tears
 You can take the wisdom of this world
 And give it to the ones who think it all ends
 here

[Chorus]

Let me be a little of your breath
 Moving over the face of the deep
 I want to be a particle of your light
 Flowing over the hills of morning
 (Flowing) Flowing over the hills of morning
 (Over the hills) Flowing over the hills of
 morning