

Homily based on the readings from June 23, 2024 (Job 38.1, 8-11; 2 Corinthians 5.14-17; Mark 4.35-41)

If you have lived in southeastern Connecticut for any length of time, it is likely that you have heard someone talking about the Great New England Hurricane of 1938. In case you are unfamiliar with the details, the hurricane made landfall – first in Long Island and then in coastal Connecticut – on September 21 of that year, with winds in New Haven recorded at 115 miles per hour. The storm damaged or destroyed more than 57,000 homes, causing property loss – in today’s terms – amounting to almost five billion dollars. Many communities along the shoreline were completely devastated, and even inland cities such as Middletown and Hartford were inundated by the overflowing of the Connecticut River. Closer to home, both Ocean Beach in New London and Bluff Point in Groton essentially came into existence as a result of the destruction wrought by the storm. I doubt many people here today remember this cataclysmic event, but all of us have certainly witnessed its effects.

One of the aspects of this disaster that is most striking is how totally *unexpected* it was. Weather forecasting, of course, was still in its infancy, so the residents of the affected areas had almost no warning of what was coming. According to contemporary accounts, the weather before the onset of the storm was remarkably calm and peaceful. People were just going about their daily business, without any concept of the devastation they would soon be forced to endure.

This type of situation – calmness preceding catastrophe – is not, of course, limited to *natural* disasters. Unlike the hurricane of 1938, most of us *do* remember the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. I was living in Virginia at the time, about a hundred miles from the Pentagon, and I remember how astoundingly clear and blue the sky was that morning. There was no way anyone could have possibly imagined the horrors that would soon be taking place. Without a doubt, there are countless other calamities – both natural and man-made – that can occur without any warning whatsoever.

Nevertheless, the inherent unpredictability of *weather* occupies a unique place within our collective consciousness. Even in modern times, when meteorologists have access to a wide range of satellite imagery and predictive models, long-term forecasting still amounts to educated *guesswork*. In fact, it has been mathematically demonstrated that even the simplest atmospheric systems behave chaotically; in other words, human beings will *never* be able to wrap our minds around the behavior of the weather, no matter how sophisticated our technology becomes.

If weather is dangerous and unpredictable in the 20th and 21st centuries, imagine how it must have been perceived in Biblical times. As you may have noticed, three of our four readings this [morning/evening] directly deal with the power of wind and water. Perhaps the most dramatic is the account from the Gospel, which describes Jesus and his disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee aboard a small boat. As we heard a few minutes ago, a “violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat,” so that the disciples were justifiably terrified. Our Lord, of course, was “asleep on a cushion,” not because he was indifferent to his

disciples' distress, but because he knew who really has mastery over the elements of nature. Without a moment's hesitation, he was able to quiet the storm simply by rebuking it.

The point, of course, is that there is only one power in the *universe* that can control the wind and the sea – and all the other forces, both visible and invisible, that can burst abruptly into our daily lives. That power, of course, is God himself. In the words of today's psalm:

His command raised up a storm wind
which tossed its waves on high. ...
He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze,
and the billows of the sea were stilled.

The first reading, from the Book of Job, makes this point even more explicitly. What we heard was a small portion of a lengthy explanation, where God reaffirms his mastery over every aspect of the created order. God presents Job with a rhetorical question:

Who shut within doors the sea,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling bands?

The answer to this, and to many similar questions, is *God himself and God alone*. As Job declares to the Lord a few chapters later, “I know that *you* can do all things, and that no purpose of *yours* can be hindered.”

The truth is that most of us, at least most of the time, will not have to endure the destructive power of the roaring sea or the howling wind – or any other kind of overwhelming cataclysm. Nevertheless, throughout our lives, we will be subject on a daily basis to countless forces over which we have no mastery – whether they relate to our finances, our personal relationships, our careers, our health, or the broader culture in which we all live. Our task as Christians is to set aside the *illusion* of control and to embrace – willingly and joyfully – whatever plan God has established for our lives. Having the *courage* to surrender our *selves* to

Christ is the *only* way our tiny boat will *ever* reach the far side of the sea.