Genesis 7:17-24, John 6:15-21

“Don’t rock the boat”

 It has been a real whirlwind around the church this past week. The sanctuary improvements have been going along so workers and church members have been in and out. The Well has been launched so people have been curious and stopping in and members of the church have been working hard to get it up and running. But the start of preschool has been especially exciting with all of our classes full and kids coming and in varying degrees wanting or not wanting to be here.

 I try to be as visible as possible to meet the kids and the parents. As I was walking out of church one of the first days one little girl pointed at me and proudly identified me to her father and said: Daddy, that’s our new book reader. I’ll take that title. I’m the new book reader.

 Jesus our Savior in John 6 today reveals to his disciples the title by which they should know him, by which they should follow and obey him. The title or how he self identifies who he is, is far more threatening than any that others have given him or that we have heard to date. It is a title that is bound to rock the boat of institutionalized Judaism.

 Noah and his family in the building of the ark refused to succumb to the pressures of the world and followed God’s mission for them in spite of what the neighbors had to say and in spite of having to take some action that inevitably would have rocked the boat of common sense and even sanity.

 As followers of Jesus Christ and as a church family we have the mandate to rock the boat, to go against a status quo if the current leaning of society attempts to bring the world into the church. We, as the church, are often told not to rock the boat, but my approach is that at times it has to be rocked in order for Jesus to break through and be proclaimed. Today we get to see two people who rocked the boat and take a lesson from them.

**READ**

Because of Sight and Sounds’ presentation of Noah a few years back and our very own Patty Hunt playing the role of Noah’s wife you all probably know the story better or just as well as I do. We pick up the Scripture with Noah and his wife and all of his family safe and soun and tucked away in the ark while the storm rages outside to the point of covering mountains. Why are they safe and sound? Well, because in the previous Scriptures you see that out of faith Noah listened to God. He refused to listen to the people around him. You know one of the favorite scenes when we think of Noah is the people making fun of Noah with this big ark in his yard, but then once it starts to rain they are pounding on the door wanting to be a part of it when the rain and the floods come.

 Now, we don’t read in Scripture that any people paid any attention to Noah. He could have built this Ark on the back acres of his farm and nobody would have noticed, but we like to set the world against Noah and his family. It makes the story more dramatic and the sermon that much better to depict a conflict between them and the world. Maybe, but we don’t read about it.

 But we do read that because of his faith in God and God’s covenant and his refusal to succumb to the pressures that may have been present: neighbors, society, common sense, he was able to promise and follow God’s plans for his life. We do read that the world was living as usual and Noah had to step out of that and rock the boat by being himself which was guided by God so powerfully as Matthew and Luke tell us. Hebrews 11 speaks about Noah’s faith even in the contrast that it would be according to wordly standards.

 Rocking the boat or not rocking the boat around you can often be a fine line. We live in a region where the last thing the Amish would want is to draw attention to themselves. Yet they fully recognize that their lifestyle is one which goes against the grain of the world and of our prevalent society. The cleaning company that takes care of the church has some Amish that help and I spoke some with one of the women. She told me stories of people chasing their buggies and stopping right in front for pictures or walking into their homes and property and taking pictures as if it were a museum.

 We are having quite a bit of work done around our house and some of it is done by Amish contractors. I had to drive Samuel home the other day and he said: I have to ask, how is it that you and your wife are so down to earth? I didn’t think he meant earthy because of the mud in our basement from the water coming in that he was trying to fix. He could have said plain or simple. I took it as a huge compliment because that is part of what I see as being part of my ministry and that of the church to live lives that are very earthy, in touch with people and each other and God. Not so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good.

 The world should see us and recognize that we are different because of our lives reflect the teachings of Scripture. I think of many of you and the presence that you are in this community and how your lives reflect the generosity of Christ, reflect the unselfishness of our Savior, reflect the grace and mercy of Jesus and people in this community see this and want to emulate it. But at times because of our positions in this society we may quietly follow what we see as Christ’s leading and that may rock the boat or make some people upset, and if that happens, then praise God, it was meant to be.

 We certainly have a great example in our Savior who was very willing to give up so much in order to take on a love for us that is so apparent. Jesus spent his entire life rocking the boat but not because he sought it out but because his love and his goal was to bring people to him. That’s all he wanted.

 In fact, that is exactly the way that our Scripture begins in vs. 15. Jesus, our translation reads, “withdrew” again to the mountains. Do you know what the literal Greek is for withdrew? He fled from the people. He ran from them as fast as he could. Why was he fleeing? Because the crowd wanted to make him king. The sing of a true leader is that they flee from wanting to be made king. They don’t look for CNN moments. They may rock the boat and change the world but it is for the glory of God. Jesus, listen to this now, Jesus preferred solitude with God than the power of kingship.

 The Scripture that takes us to the actual reenactment of the metaphor with the boat rocking on the Sea of Galilee. I can’t wait to lead you to Israel. We will have the chance to take a boat out on the Sea of Galilee. The sea is like a small tea cup surrounded by mountain so that when storms come they come suddenly, powerfully, and without warning. That’s what happened that evening as the disciples were desperately rowing to get to the other side of Capernaum.

 Jesus walks on the water and greets the terrified disciples with a title that will rock the boat and all of civilization. He says what? It is I, or in Greek, Ego eimi which is literally: “I am”. Who else called himself I am? Almighty God to a terrified Moses as he spoke to him from a burning bush. Who are you? I am the God of your ancestors, I am. When Jesus uses this title it is meant to calm the fear of the disciples. In reality it is also a correction of a false notion that the people had seen him in vs. 14 and called him…, and then how they called him in vs. 15…, He finally sets the record straight and says, I am.

 By claiming this title he completely puts himself up against the world because it is going to take a lot for people to believe that. When he was crucified on the cross that title supposedly went down with him. But in his resurrection, he rocked the boat, he tipped the boat over, he not only rocked the boat, he tipped the boat over, because I’d like to know, if you’ve got the motion. He proved that he was indeed God, the Savior of the world.

 As a people and as individuals we can’t shy away from being more like Jesus and Noah. I know it is so much easier to live quiet lives and to live and let live. But that hasn’t been the history of this church. Our love for mission, our daring ministries of New Beginnings, our commitment to the youth, our experiment with worship which is not an experiment but a desire to love and serve God completely. It is all a reflection of a church that would rather pursue Christ intimately, than to sit back and let the world come to it. In some churches liability guides their programs, we can’t let that happen.

 Some churches allow societal issues to define who they are. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to be quiet, the crowd wanted him to be king, but he was called to be a servant God. That is shocking. That rocks the boat of any preconceived notion we may have. The world would love for us to be quiet, the people would love for us to take divisive stands on issues, but our task is to seek out God’s will in Scripture and to live it out.

 You know it is so scary what is happening in the Middle East supposedly in the name of Allah to protect this image of a God who apparently can’t protect himself. I am so saddened by the death of our Ambassador and the death of those marines that were killed in Lydia. But I wonder about the intensity of their religious beliefs. Who of us has a faith that is so passionate that we are not afraid to rock the boat? The extremism of the religious fervor scares us, but maybe our complacency ought to scare us more.

 No political party can define our Christian viewpoint. The opposite must be true. Our Christian viewpoint has to define our politics. I’ll talk more about that in October. But let me just say that when a denomination takes sides on issues that 100% line up with the democratic party, that is a problem. Likewise, when an individual takes sides on issues that 100% line up with the republican party that is equally a problem. Jesus Christ rocked the boat by the fact that he could only be defined by the term I am. Just as we should rock the boat by only being defined as Christians.

 May God bless us and keep us as we look to do that. Amen.