**Mark’s Gospel: *Jesus and the Kingdom***

**Sunday October 13, 2019**

**Mark #6: *Caught in a Storm* (Mark 4:35-41)**

**1. Introduction: *Stormy Weather!***

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, “Certainly the preacher won’t think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this.” Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, “We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this” (*Our Daily Bread*, August 26, 1989).

This funny little anecdote should get us all thinking about how we response to stormy weather. The apostle Paul wrote, “Always be joyful.Never stop praying.*Be thankful in all circumstances*, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). Admittedly, being thankful in all circumstances is a pretty tall order, even for the best of us. Certainly, in the good times, it’s easy for us to be thankful to God. But when we face difficulties, it becomes a real challenge. It’s hard to find a silver lining on a dark storm cloud. Especially when it threatens to rain on our parade. How can we be thankful to God, even amidst the storms of life?

This morning’s Gospel lesson tells the story of a terrifying storm and the disciples’ reaction to that storm. Perhaps, if we put ourselves into this story, we might be able to reflect on the ways that we respond to the adversities of life.

**2. The Fear of the Disciples**

This story works on a couple of different levels. On the one hand, it’s a miracle story that demonstrates the power of Jesus over the wind and the sea. So, it reveals some very important information about Jesus. On the other hand, it’s a discipleship story that exposes the disciples’ lack of faith and failure to comprehend Jesus’ true identity. So, the blunders of the disciples hold a mirror up to our lives, compelling us to consider our spiritual condition before God. Do we have the faith to trust Jesus amidst the storm? Do we truly understand who Jesus is? These two questions are related. Faith and understanding go together because you have to know people before you can truly trust them.

The scene begins as Jesus finishes teaching his parables on the kingdom of God (Mark 4:34). When this teaching time began the crowd was so large that Jesus needed to get into a boat and put out into the water in order to have a place to instruct the people (Mark 4:1-2). By the end of his talk it’s evening and he’s still in the boat. So, he instructs his disciples to set sail for the other side of the lake (Mark 4:35). This is when the fun begins!

The geography of the Sea of Galilee makes it susceptible to wild storm activity. It is a below-sea-level lake, which is surrounded by high mountains. This causes abrupt temperature shifts that can lead to sudden and violent storms. In addition, the northern end of the lake has no natural protection, so strong winds can easily blow in. Normally the wind is stronger in the afternoon than the morning or evening, so fishing was often done at night. So, when the disciples set out that evening, they assumed that there would be no danger on the water. Much to their surprise, a fierce storm did blow up that evening, making this experience even more threatening.

Mark gives a brief, yet vivid description of the tempest on the lake: “*But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water*” (Mark 4:37). Strong winds and high waves suddenly made their journey across the lake very treacherous. The waves were so high that their boat began to fill up with water and it wasn’t stopping. Fearful of their very lives, they roused Jesus from his sleep (Mark 4:38). Jesus, exhausted from a long day of teaching, had found a cushion at the back of the boat and was in a deep sleep. So, the disciples, terrified by the storm, woke their master up. This storm must have been very bad to rattle the disciples this much since four of them, Simon, Andrew, James and John, were experienced fishermen. Spending their lives on the lake, they had likely encountered many storms before. This one must have been different enough to push these hardened fishermen into such a panic.

With the boat filling up with water and the prospect of death real, they questioned Jesus’ awareness and concern at the seriousness of their situation. “*Teacher*,” they said, “*don’t you care that we’re going to drown?*” (Mark 4:38). The raging storm produced fear and doubt in the hearts of the disciples. Their appeal to Jesus was not a calm request to a trusted savior, but the frightened reproach of those whose faith was defeated by danger.

How do we respond to the fierce storms in our lives? Real weather disasters, like hurricanes, tornadoes and typhoons bring great destruction and the loss of life. But I want us to think about the figurative storms in our lives; the adverse circumstances that cause us great distress. Things like, family conflict, marriage breakdown, unemployment, financial difficulties, future uncertainty, mental illness, deteriorating health, aging, bereavement, addiction, and the list could go on. I don’t pretend to know what each one of you is going through and I don’t want to give you a simplistic answer to the unique difficulties that you face. But I do want to say that God is with you. Amidst the wild tempest, it may seem like he’s unresponsive to your situation. You may even feel like repeating the disciples’ words, “Don’t you care about me?” In the darkest of times, it may seem like God has abandoned you. But he is there in the boat with you.

**3. The Disciples’ Lack of Faith**

Responding to the desperate pleas of his disciples, Jesus brought a tremendous calm to this terrifying situation. He spoke directly to the wind and the waves and rebuked them, saying, “*Silence! Be still!”* (Mark 4:39). Immediately, the howling wind and the raging sea obeyed the Lord’s commands. “*The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass*” (Mark 4:39, *The Message*). Jesus transformed the great storm into a great calm. His miraculous power over the elements gives us special insight into his identity. Throughout the Old Testament, God himself is the one who rules over the wind and the waves. The psalmist declares of God, “*You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them*” (Psalm 89:9). Elsewhere, psalmist proclaims, “*He (God) rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert*” (Psalm 106:9). The message of the story is clear. Jesus, the one who rebuked the sea and calmed the storm is God himself. He is a personal and living God who intervenes in the circumstances of human life and brings deliverance. Just as God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt and made a way for them through the Red Sea, so Jesus leads a new Exodus and provides salvation for everyone.

After calming the storm, Jesus confronted his disciples. “*Why are you afraid?”* he asked,“*Do you still have no faith?”* (Mark 4:40). His probing questions make a clear connection between *fear* and *faith,* suggesting that the disciples’ terror at the surging sea was the result of their failure to trust him. Their frantic words, “*Don’t you care that we’re going to drown?*” demonstrated their doubt in him. They doubted his concern for their lives and questioned his willingness to intervene in their situation. They didn’t trust Jesus, so they responded to the storm with fear and panic.

The disciple’s lack of faith holds a mirror up to us, forcing us to answer these same questions whenever we face hardships. Are we going to let fear overwhelm us or are we going to have faith in Jesus? Many years ago when Sherri and I were experiencing profound grief, a kind doctor said to us, “*Time is a healer, and faith is a healer.”* Our faith in Jesus helps us through the most difficult of circumstances because our faith is in the One who can calm the raging sea and bring us peace.

**4. The Disciples’ Limited Understanding**

We might look at this story and wonder why the disciples lacked faith in Jesus. After all, hadn’t they already observed his miraculous powers of healing and exorcism? Yet in their defense, they had never seen anything like this! We need to remember that the disciples were only beginning to grapple with the truth about Jesus. Over the course of their time with him, various pieces of the puzzle fell into place until they came to the point of fully comprehending who he was. This event, this epiphany of Jesus, was one more piece of the puzzle that filled in their picture of Jesus. So it makes perfect sense that in the aftermath of the calming of the storm, they experienced awe, wonder and fear at the amazing power of Rabbi (Teacher) Jesus. “*Who is this man?*” they asked each other, “*Even the wind and waves obey him!*” (Mark 4:41). We the readers know the answer to their question - *He is Christ, the Son of God*.

While the disciples were only beginning to piece together a full picture of Jesus, we have the advantage of the New Testament and two thousand years of theological reflection on the person of Jesus. Yet even with all this information, we sometimes still lack faith amidst the storms of life. I guess there is a difference between knowing the facts about Jesus and knowing him personally. While knowing the truth about Jesus is vitally important to our Christian faith, all that head knowledge needs to flow into our hearts and impact the way we live our lives. This story teaches us that Jesus is Lord over the wind and the waves. But we need to know Jesus personally as the One who has control over the storms that we face.

*Do we really know and trust the One who can sustain us through the storms of life?* Let us move from fear to faith in the knowledge of the One who is Lord over the raging sea.

Listen to this *affirmation of faith*.

*Lord, you have always given*

*Bread for the coming day;*

*And though I am poor,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always given*

*Strength for the coming day;*

*And though I am weak,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always given*

*Peace for the coming day;*

*And though of anxious heart,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always kept me*

*Safe in trials;*

*And now, tried as I am,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always marked*

*The road for the coming day;*

*And though it may be hidden,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always lightened*

*This darkness of mine;*

*And though the night is here,*

*Today I believe.*

*Lord, you have always spoken*

*When time was ripe;*

*And though you be silent,*

*Today I believe.*

(*Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals,* p. 70)