

Don't Let Life Sink Your Boat

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10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Mark 4: 35-41

First Presbyterian Church
Uvalde, Texas

Our lesson today takes us to the other side of the lake. Jesus and his disciples are crossing over the lake of Galilee. The story takes place in the middle of Jesus' ministry where he has been teaching and healing the Jews on the West bank of the Lake of Galilee, and is now in the boat "crossing over" to start his ministry with the "pagans," or the Gentiles.

I love Mark's interpretation of this story—the details are so vivid, I can picture the scene in my mind. It was evening time, and after a long, exhausting day of teaching, the group decides to leave in a boat to escape the crowds they had been with all day. Mark tells us that Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat on a pillow. Jesus was in the position in which any distinguished guest would be seated—at the stern. The helmsman was probably up in the front so he could have a better view of what was coming ahead of them.

Suddenly, a storm, from seemingly out of nowhere arose. As the disciples' small boat was being tossed and turned, the men were truly afraid they might drown. They were terrified they may die, and upon looking to their beloved Master—he was still asleep! "Jesus!" They said, "Don't you care that we are about to die?" Jesus awoke and gave to strong commands—"Be quiet...Be still!" as Today's English Version translates it. A more familiar "Peace... be still!" is probably recognized by some of you, but "Be quiet... Be still" probably translates the force by which Jesus spoke these words. It is interesting that Jesus uses the same commands here as he did when he addressed the demon-possessed man in Mark 1:25. The storm calmed and the disciples were totally awestruck. "Who is this man who can even calm the seas?" they say.

We do not give this story justice if we only read it in a literalistic way. If we try to understand Jesus and the disciples' conversation as merely talking about a storm and Jesus' ability to calm the storm, we miss a great deal.

If we look at this story, however, in a symbolic way, there are many truths to be found that not only tell us about the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, but about the relationship between Jesus and us today.

The first symbol I want to discuss with you are the words "crossing over." The text says "Let us cross over to the other side." Perhaps Jesus was talking about more than merely going to the other side of the lake. Remember I mentioned earlier that Jesus and his disciples were now going into alien territory—Jesus was ready now to begin teaching the Gentiles, which was something that had never been done before.

Is there a lesson in "crossing over" that we can learn today? Is there someone you know that doesn't know about Jesus? Is it time for you to cross over the lake and tell them about Jesus? Perhaps some of the terror the disciples were feeling had to do

with speaking about Jesus to someone who was different than they. Perhaps you share some of those same uneasy feelings.

But look how Jesus responds to his disciples. “Why are you afraid, have you still no faith?” he says. The Greek word that our text translates as “storm” is also the word used for “whirlwind.” Do you ever feel so caught up in life and in life’s problems that you feel you are caught in a whirlwind?

We all have so much going on in our lives today...our jobs, or finding a job, paying the household bills, making sure our families are taken care of—providing food and clothing. Maybe you are taking care of an aging parent or caring for a grandchild. Life can be a whirlwind sometimes, can’t it?

The good news is that the words Jesus used to calm the storm that was tossing to and fro the disciples’ boat are the same words he says to you and me today. “Be quiet... Be still.”

Just as God had the authority over the chaos at the creation, and the terror brought on by the storm on the Lake of Galilee, Jesus Christ has the authority and ability to calm the whirlwinds, the storms in our lives today.

Let’s talk about the question Jesus poses to his disciples; “Have you no faith?” Faith in the Gospel of Mark means in part recognition that Jesus is Christ and Son of God, but in this story, faith means primarily the trust which the disciples lacked when they feared for their lives and cried out in panic.

In your storms of doubt and tension and uncertainty do any of you ever wonder whether or not there is a God, and does God really know and care about *my* problems? Maybe you are sure there is a God, but picture Jesus asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat? We cry out in the midst of our storm—“God, don’t you care, are you asleep?”

But look what happened to the disciples once they realized Jesus *was* with them in the boat, and he had the authority to calm even the strongest storms. Once they knew he was there, a fearless calm entered their hearts. To voyage with Jesus was to voyage in peace even in a storm. This, my friends is not something that only happened to the disciples thousands of years ago. It is something which still happens and which can happen for us. In the presence of Jesus we can have peace even in the wildest storms of life.

The chief enemy of peace, I think, is worry. We worry about ourselves, we worry about the ones we love, and we worry about the unknown future. But Jesus speaks to us of a Father whose hand will never cause his children a needless tear and of a love beyond which neither we nor those we love can ever drift.

In the storms of anxiety and worry, in the whirlwind of life’s problems Jesus Christ brings us a peace that passes all understanding. Jesus brings us the peace of the love of God, which will never sink your boat or tip it over.

Be quiet... Be still. Remember, Jesus may be asleep on a pillow at the back of your boat, but he is there, and he has the authority to still the most troubled waters. Trust in our Lord Jesus Christ to calm all your storms.
Amen.