

The Storm is Receding

Mark 4: 35-41

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May the God who creates us....

Good Morning!

Friends, I believe we are in that time, in a small boat, in the middle of a sea, right after a fierce storm has suddenly ceased. The wind is still, the quiet actually seems deafening now that the wind is no longer screaming, the water is lazily lapping. And we are wondering - can we relax? Is it okay to breathe? Do we dare trust that the worst is behind us?

Do you know what I mean?

Let's just say I've had my time in a small boat in Gale Force winds, 50 mph off the Isle of Skye in Scotland. The full description of that is definitely a sermon for another day, but the after-effects of those 45 minutes of water spouts, almost black skies, lightning strikes, hail, thunder, and 8-foot super nasty breaking waves felt much more like five hours as I seriously wondered if I would make it to land.

Not too long ago archeologists uncovered a boat buried in the shore of the receding Sea of Galilee. A boat, that dated back to the first century. A boat probably used by fishermen of that time. It was 27 feet long, about 7.5 feet wide with side railings about 4 feet up, with a flat bottom thus enabling the boat to get close—to shore to fish—but with very little secondary stability—no keel— so in flat water it probably felt very stable, but in waves, as the seas get tossed, that design is going to make it pretty easy to get caught cross-wise with a wave and tip over. The boat had a mast for a sail and four oarlocks. So it could be sailed or rowed or both.

Having a sense of the type of boat the apostles may have been in and having been in some lumpy water myself, I have an idea of how the apostles were feeling, what their boat was doing that evening as they were with Jesus, crossing the Sea of Galilee when a massive storm suddenly appears.

I can see them straining at the oars—against a headwind that will not quit. The waves are coming at them. It's an inland sea—so these are strictly wind waves—but you have

to remember it was just wind waves that sank the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Wind waves on a freshwater lake are sharper, quicker, and much more erratic than salt-water ocean waves, generated by tides.

Waves on an inland sea this size can get up to ten—to twelve feet or even more. It's an interesting day, a day you will not soon forget when you're in a boat and looking up at the water that is about to crash down onto you. When a squall hits you out on the open water—time stands still. It could be a half-hour and then it's gone—but that half-hour can drag on and feel like six hours. Like I've said, I've been there—I have stories and the trauma.

The waves are no doubt coming at them from two or three different directions—rebounding off the cliffs—running back into each other and then doubling in size and disappearing into holes. It's trigonometry made real.

It's at night—they don't have lights—it's a storm so the clouds are blocking what light the moon had to give. It's not like they have glow sticks or flashlights. All they can see is the white crest of the wave before it and the one behind it tumbles over the bow of their boat. There is no bigger wave than the wave that is about to come over the bow of the boat you are sitting in.

They are slowly inching their way forward—because they're probably rowing, trying to have some control, no doubt their sail is stowed or only a very small portion of it is up. But for every yard forward the boat yaws a couple of feet side to side. It is as if they are in a dark sizzling frying pan and they are the unlucky drop of water getting popped and tossed.

I think life goes this way at times. I think we have been living in this storm, in the midst of COVID 19. Sometimes it has felt as if God has been sound asleep, off in the stern, curled up on a cushion making those snoring, sleep noises. oblivious to our fears not noticing —the very real wind, waves, and storms buffeting our boat, our life raft—missing the mishaps, the misfortunes, and calamities of our lives.

Hasn't it felt like that at times?

But then comes the moment when the apostles can do no more, competent fishermen though they are. They cry out—wake him up and ask him questions similar to the ones many of us have been asking—“Do you not care---can you not see?”

He wakes and stands, and stills the sea. Peace. Be Still—have you no faith?

And this is where we are right now. Although all the signs point to the storm ending, we wonder if we can believe that. Six hundred thousand Americans dead, almost four million dead around the world. Vaccinations are happening here—not quite fast enough—so get vaccinated if you haven't already, but what of the rest of the world.

Our state is reopening, restrictions are being lifted, we are coming back to in-person worship in our churches—but what will it be like?

What comes next? What comes now? As we reemerge from this time will our communities of faith be smaller? Many people, who could, were super generous supporting our churches and not for profits—but will this continue?

Can we do hybrid worship? Can we plan for a new world, and a new experience when quite frankly we are still so amped up and exhausted from the storm, the idea of trying to implement something new sends most of us right back over the edge.

Those I think were the exact feelings the apostles must have had as Jesus looked at them in the quiet and said, "Have you no faith?"

And then what did they do? They rowed that supper soggy boat to the shore in the region of the Gerasenes. They took their ministry to the gentile territory, to a place and people in which they were not comfortable. But this is where Jesus calls them to be, challenges them to go. To do new and different things in places and with people they did not know.

Have you no faith?

Friends, God has been in the boat with us through it all. We are scarred and we are still scared, but I do believe the storm is stilling and the waves are dying. It's time for us to take deep, deep breaths, to sigh and breathe and sigh and breathe some more, and then to turn slowly and begin to row to the distant shore. Where God is calling us to embrace a whole new way of being. A way we cannot know yet, but go we must. Have you no faith?

Amen.