

Calming the Storms **Mark 4:35-41**

A mother was out walking with her 4 year old daughter. The child picked up something off the ground and started to put it into her mouth. The mother took it away and said "Don't do that!"

"Why not?" asked the child. "Because it's on the ground," said her mother. "You don't know where it's been. It's dirty, and it's probably loaded with germs that could make you sick."

The child looked at her mother with total admiration and said, "Mommy, how do you know all this stuff? You're so smart." The mother said, "All Moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom's Test. You have to know it or they don't let you be a Mom."

There was silence for a minute or so as the child thought this through. "Oh, I get it," she said at last. "And if you don't pass the test you have to be the Daddy?" (1)

Today is Father's Day. There are many great dads in our congregation and we want to honor them today. After all, it's not easy being a Dad.

A woman wrote to a magazine to tell about something that had occurred in her family when she was about eighteen months old. Her mother was out and her dad was in charge of her and her brother who was four years older. She says that she was playing with her tea set which was one of her favorite toys.

Her Dad was in the living room engrossed in the evening news and her brother was playing nearby in the living room when the little girl brought her Dad a little cup of make-believe 'tea,' which was just plain water. After several cups of this tea and lots of praise from Dad for making such a yummy concoction, the little girl's Mom came home. Her Dad made Mom wait in the living room to watch this eighteen-month-old bring him a cup of tea, because it was "just the cutest thing!"

Her Mom waited, and sure enough, here the girl came down the hall with a cup of tea for her Daddy. Mom watched Dad drink this special tea, then asked, "Did it ever occur to you that the only place that baby can reach to get water is the toilet?" (2)

"Yuck!" It's not easy being a Dad. But never before has it been more important that we have good Dads. These are stressful times that require strong parenting. Not every biological father is a good Dad. And today there are stepdads who are facing the challenge of being a Dad to children who may or may not be ready to accept them. There are also grandfathers who are filling the role of surrogate Dads. This is a new world, particularly with regard to the family. Today we sincerely salute all those men who are

conscientiously seeking to provide a wholesome Christian environment to young people, in whatever role they may be.

Our Gospel lesson today is very appropriate and timely. Jesus and his disciples are in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee when suddenly a storm comes. We all experience storms in life, troubles, adversities – dads, moms, children. There are things that happen in our own lives and in the world around us that make us fear and tremble. How do we make it through the storms of life?

Victor Hugo, who is famous for his novel the Hunchback of Notre Dame, also wrote a story called "Ninety-Three." It tells of a ship caught in a dangerous storm on the high seas. At the height of the storm, the frightened sailors heard a terrible crashing noise below the deck. They knew at once that this new noise came from a cannon, part of the ship's cargo, that had broken loose. It was moving back and forth with the swaying of the ship, crashing into the side of the ship with terrible impact. Knowing that it could cause the ship to sink, two brave sailors volunteered to make the dangerous attempt to retie the loose cannon. They knew the danger of a shipwreck from the cannon was greater than the fury of the storm. That is like human life. Storms of life may blow about us, but it is not these exterior storms that pose the gravest danger. It is the terrible corruption that can exist within us which can overwhelm us. The furious storm outside may be overwhelming but what is going on inside can pose the greater threat to our lives. Our only hope lies in conquering the enemy within.

Unfortunately storms that rage within us cannot be cured by ourselves. It takes the power of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ. It takes the forgiveness and peace that Jesus won for us on Calvary's cross. He is our only hope of calming the storm that can harm our souls and cripple our lives.

That's what the disciples learned this day on the Sea of Galilee. They thought the danger lie outside the boat. They would soon learn the real danger lie within the boat, within their own hearts. In a word, they lacked faith. And without faith their lives were at risk to the storms which would inevitably come. And come they did and come they will. So what can we learn from this boat ride in the storm?

I. First, we learn that **storms can come suddenly.**

It had been a memorable afternoon. From far and near people had gathered to hear Jesus the Galilean tell them about the Kingdom of God. He told them that the kingdom was like a farmer who went out to sow seeds. He compared the Kingdom to the small mustard seed, which becomes a giant plant. He told

many stories, but the day was now fast passing and it was time to depart. Jesus told his disciples that they must go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Surely the disciples must have questioned the decision. Why leave now? They were right on the verge of success. Here was where the people were. On the other side are only Gerasenes. They were pagans. But the disciples did as Jesus instructed. They set sail that beautiful afternoon on the Sea of Galilee. The sun was shining and Jesus, weary from the day's activity, fell asleep. As the late afternoon faded into dusk, trouble began to loom. The white puffy clouds that dotted the sky were replaced by low hanging, black clouds. The stilled waters began to churn with white caps and then large waves that slammed the side of the tiny boat. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for these sudden and violent squalls. The disciples must have thought that in telling them to cross over, Jesus had led them to their destruction, not their salvation.

Let me tell you something. Trouble can come just that fast in your life. Everything can be going beautifully, people can be congratulating you; things can be going your way. Then all of a sudden the telephone can ring and everything in your life can be turned upside down. Your medical test results can come back, and all of a sudden you find yourself in the midst of a storm. It doesn't take long for the storms to come.

I was speaking to a pastor friend from San Antonio on Thursday. He shared something that happened in his congregation last week. A young couple in their 30's had their third child last Saturday night, healthy baby, beautiful child, and amazing gift from God. The mom, Scarlett, started having some post partum complications on Sunday, internal bleeding, her body began to shut down, and Monday she died. The funeral was Friday. Now the father, Matt, is left with a 5 year old, a 2 year old, and a newborn baby. No wife, no mother, and the family is devastated. We pray that God will give them the strength to carry on.

Storms can come suddenly. The disciples experienced it. Matt and his children are right in the middle of the storm. You've experienced storms. That is when we go to the stern of the boat to find Jesus asleep. He doesn't even know that a storm is raging. He can't even hear the howl of the wind. He doesn't even feel the waves crashing into the side of the boat. The water splashing all over his face doesn't disturb him. Doesn't he care? Teacher, don't you care if we drown? Doesn't God care about what I am going through? Where are you, God, when my child is sick, when I lost my job, when there is another shooting down the street, when my husband died. Where are you, God, don't you care?

The sudden furious storm outside may be overwhelming but what is going on inside can pose the greater threat to our lives. Who will calm the tempest? Who will the waves obey, "Quiet, be still!"

II. The second thing we learn from this boat ride in the storm is this – **Storms can make you lose direction.**

This is probably an obvious fact but it is one that needs mention. Many of the disciples were experienced fishermen. They had sailed those waters hundreds of times before. They had been caught in storms before. So, why all the fear in this storm? One obvious answer is this was a storm unlike any other. Possibly, but I don't think so. I think this storm was like any other. They knew how to deal with storms. What I think is this: They are chastising Jesus for not pulling his weight. The disciples find Jesus asleep and they say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" In other words, are you just going to sleep there or are you going to get up and help? Get up and grab an oar Jesus. Grab a bucket and start bailing. We need all hands on deck.

It's at this moment that the unexpected happens. Jesus gets up. He doesn't grab an oar. He doesn't get a bucket. He calms the storm. And this is why the disciples were terrified. Look at the story. The disciples are certainly frightened by the ferocity of the storm. They need everyone to pitch in but Jesus rebukes the storm, "Quiet! Be still!" The disciples are stunned. They were looking for human help. What they got was divine authority. They were looking for a hand. What they got was a God. They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Look at the text again. This is interesting. I've never really noticed this before. In the opening verses of this passage – 35, 36, 37, 38 – you don't find the word fear or terror. It's not until Jesus stills the storm that the disciples were afraid. Verse 41, "They were terrified and asked each other – Who is this?" The Greek literally says – they feared a great fear.

Let me ask you: Which would you fear more? The storm or the one who masters the storm? It is here that they lose direction. Jesus asks, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Now listen to this: They don't know who it is that rides in the boat with them. "Do you still have no faith? Do you still not understand who I am?" I'm sure they were concerned during the storm but after the storm they were terrified. Why? Because of the one who was in the boat. This Jesus was the One who, in the beginning, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, made the wind and the waves. And now in the presence of these disciples Jesus commanded the wind and the waves to be still. Their real problem is not the storm outside but the storm of doubt and unbelief inside.

Unfortunately storms that rage within us cannot be cured by ourselves. It takes the power of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ. He is our only hope of stilling the tempest of doubt that can harm our souls

and cripple our lives.

That's what the disciples learned this day on the Sea of Galilee. They thought the danger lie outside the boat. They would soon learn the real danger lie within the boat, within their own hearts. In a word, they lacked faith.

Where do you turn in the midst of the storm? It is an urgent question. It is a theological question. The answer will depend upon where you place your ultimate loyalty.

It was not the only time that the disciples had to face the question. In the 6th chapter of John we read where the crowds began to fall away from Jesus. Oh, people still followed him. But the old excitement was no longer there. Jesus was no longer talking about the Kingdom of God. He was talking about taking up a cross. He was talking about suffering and dying. It was at this point that Jesus turned to the disciples and asked, "Do you also wish to go away?"

It was Simon Peter who spoke for the group. Peter often spoke impetuously, often out of turn, often without thinking, but he always spoke from the heart. "Lord," he answered, "to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; we have come to know you as the Holy One of God."

When we find ourselves sinking in the midst of a storm, where else can we turn but to God? There was a woman in a community who was well known for her simple faith and great calm in the midst of many trials. Another woman who had never met her but had heard of her came to visit one day. "I must find out the secret of her calm, happy life," she thought to herself.

As she met her she said: "So you are the woman with the great faith I've heard so much about." "No," came the reply. "I am not the woman with the great faith, but I am the woman with the little faith in the great God."

In the boat that day on the Sea of Galilee Jesus is disappointed that his disciples still did not understand who He was and where He had come from. If they understood that, then they would not fear the sea.

When you find yourself in the midst of a storm and the boat is sinking, may I suggest that you turn to Christ? Where else are you going to go? Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only in Jesus do we receive forgiveness for our sins. Only Jesus can give us that peace that passes all understanding. Peace with God. Life in heaven. The strength to face the storms. Only God is the Holy One. Only Jesus can calm the storm. Only God delivers.

III. And that brings us to our third and final point. Storms can come suddenly. They can make us lose direction. And if we do not understand who it is that is in the boat with us then our **fear of the storm has the power to paralyze.**

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked not only the storm but the disciples. "Why are you afraid," he asked. "Have you no faith?" Now, let us be clear about this. The promise that is made to us is that of God's presence, no more, no less. In the midst of the storm, God will be in the boat with you.

You need not panic, You don't have to be terrified. Though the situation may appear bleak, the Lord of the Church is in the boat with you. You need not forsake your witness or doubt your Christian faith. The One who died and rose again for your salvation is in the boat with you. You need not become immobilized. The Lord of the storm is in the boat with you. That is the promise.

Will the clouds dissipate immediately? No guarantee. Will you no longer have to struggle with problems? The Bible doesn't say that. Will everything you do prosper as some preachers promise today, people like Joel Osteen or Robert Schuler. Probably not. Well, you say, it doesn't sound as if this promise is all that great. It may not be everything you want, but it's everything you need. And consider this. It got Noah through the storm. It got the Jews across the Red Sea and through the wilderness. It helped David to face the giant Goliath. It helped those disciples who were once so full of fear to boldly take the Gospel of salvation in Jesus to the ends of the earth. And that glorious promise that Jesus is with you in the storm will be sufficient to get you through the night. Amen.