

## The Storms of Life

*Mark 4:35-41*

In our passage Jesus presents a way to think about faith during a storm. He defines the opposite of faith here as he speaks to the disciples. What did Jesus say is the opposite of faith? Lets look again at our scripture in verse 40, "Jesus said to them, why are you **afraid**? Have you still no **faith**?" Jesus says the opposite of faith is: that's right: fear. We always say the opposite of faith is doubt, but **here** Jesus says to the disciples the opposite of faith is **fear**. They should have faith: instead they have fear, and Jesus seems a little frustrated, doesn't he? Well, since we **all** need some instruction about this subject of faith and fear, lets pray together:

"Dear God, we confess that we are afraid—we are human. Fill us with **faith** so that our cup overflows with trust and faith in you. Help us through the scary storms of life. Amen."

Anybody here afraid of spiders? Snakes? Rats or mice? Sharks? Anyone here scared of the dark? Or black cats, or breaking a mirror or walking under a ladder? What else are you afraid of? [brainstorm]. OK, we all have things we are afraid of.

Fear is a central part of being human. We all are afraid. One of the deepest fears of humanity is **death**, the ultimate spider-mouse-snake-shark encounter from which we do not return.

So in our story we have our little intrepid band of disciples, God bless them, and they are in a small boat out on the water going over to the other side of the lake. There is much kauna here—hidden meaning. From the beginning of the tradition of scripture, going over to the other side meant leaving the comforts of the Jewish homeland, leaving civilization and striking out into the wicked world. And the water and storms usually are a metaphor for the troubles in life. So the set up for our little story uses symbols to tell us this is not just about the disciples in a boat with Jesus, but it is also about **us** in the boat with God, and we are all overcome by the storms of life. Now we could just look at this story and say that Jesus performs a miracle by calming the storm, but Jesus isn't here to calm storms anymore. Maybe we should look at the parable a bit deeper. What happens **in our lives** when we encounter a storm? A big storm that feels like it will take us to the bottom of our life and squeeze the breath out of us. The group of folks at Emanuel church in Charleston that were shot this last week were studying this very scripture. And in the midst of their Bible study, a storm swept over them. What happened to their lives and the life of their church?

If we have a loving and caring God (which we do!) then why does God even let us get caught in storms? Why aren't we swept away to some clear tropical paradise and kept safe and sound and away from all storms forever? Well, we **WILL** be safe from all storms some day, but for now, on this earth, in this life, the storms are here, and we will be caught in them. Bad things happen to good people. Storms happen. The issue in our story **is not the storms**. The issue is what we, as followers of Jesus, do when we are caught in the storms. Our story teaches clearly that the disciples wanted Jesus to sweep the storm away—to save them. "Do you not care that we are perishing?" they scream at Jesus.

How does Jesus answer their question? Not by using words. Even in the middle of this terrible storm, Jesus is sleeping peacefully in the back of the boat. Why? Didn't Jesus care? Or is something else going on here?

Lets look at this situation another way. In this symbolic boat going through the symbolic storms of life while going to the symbolic other side of life, these disciples, some of whom were very experienced fishermen and knew this lake and storms well, get overwhelmed. The ordinary day rears up into a very un-ordinary storm. Bad stuff is at our doorstep, pounding on our little boat. Life has gone haywire. A Pilikia Bomb explodes. I want you to stop and think about the last time a storm overcame YOU. When was your life swallowed in a storm of craziness and anger? When last did you wonder if you were going to make it out alive? Did you cry out? Were you angry? Did you wonder where God was? I think if we are honest, we have all felt these strong feelings of fear. When things do not go our way, we get angry and panicky and fearful. Here is where the disciples were, right along with us in panic and fear in the storm. We have all been there because we are human.

And whenever we find ourselves in this place of panic and fear, Jesus, who is always sleeping in **our** boat, too, is awakened by our panic and he stands up and Jesus says...[pause]

What **does** your Jesus say to you? In our story today, amid the chaos and crashing waves and destruction, Jesus stands up [pause] calmly. I imagine the waves still crashing all around, but the disciples stop focusing on the chaos, and start focusing on Jesus. When we pay attention to the chaos, our lives are chaos. When we focus on the peace of Jesus, our lives take on the peace of Jesus. You have all known a kūpuna who was able to be calm in the middle of the craziness. Someone who kept their cool when everyone else lost theirs. You all know someone like this. Some people do not panic and run around with their head cut off. Some people are calm, and focus on what needs to be done. Jesus stands up calmly in the raging storm, which is inside and outside of the disciples—and things begin to change. At first, the disciple's insides change. The panic inside the disciples is replaced with trust and faith in God. Things begin to calm down. Jesus calmed the disciples with his presence and his trust in God. Deep faith and trust is contagious. Jesus was **sleeping** he had so much trust in God, and when he wakes up these crazy disciples are tearing their hair out and panicking. People always focus on the miracle of Jesus calming the outer storm. But Jesus calmed the **inner storm** of the disciples, and their fear was replaced with the opposite of fear, faith and trust in God. **Calming the inner storm is the real miracle here. Jesus calmed their inner storm when the disciples focused on Jesus instead of the storm.**

Now what Jesus now **says** is very important here. He has calmed the disciples down. Now, they are able to focus on God, not their circumstances, and Jesus tells them, *I will always calm the storm.* [pause] Is that what Jesus says? NO! That is not what Jesus says, but that is the lesson most people take from this parable—that Jesus will calm the storms of their lives. But, instead, listen to what Jesus **really** says, [pause] “Why are you **afraid**? Have you still no **faith**?” I am here with you Jesus says. I will always be with you in the storm, and if you focus on me rather than the crashing waves, the storm will fade and your faith and trust in me

will get you through. Do not be afraid: instead, focus on Jesus and your faith in God will get you through!

Jesus **does not** promise to take the storms of life away. Instead, Jesus is always with us in the boat, and if we trust in God, if we have faith in God, God will walk with us always.

The Psalmist says, “Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will **fear** no evil, for thou art with me!” The Psalmist does not ask for the storms to go away, but instead reminds us that trust in God removes our fears! The valley of the shadow of death does not go away—but our fear of it goes away when we trust in God!

Through every storm, through every crashing wave, through every panic attack, even through the storm of death, Jesus is with us and guides us to calm seas and clear skies where we will and be with Jesus forever.

Storms **will** come. We need not fear! Trust in God. Amen.