

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

When a mother saw a thunderstorm forming in mid-afternoon, she worried about her seven-year-old daughter who would be walking the three blocks from school to home.

Deciding to meet her, the mother saw her walking nonchalantly along, stopping to smile whenever lightning flashed.

Seeing her mother, the little girl ran to her, explaining happily, "All the way home, God's been taking my picture!"

Did you ever stop to think about what you would be feeling if you were in one of the boats during that terrible storm? Would you be afraid? Would you be angry with Jesus for sleeping instead of helping? It doesn't take much for me to know how I would feel—at least about the storm.

I used to hate storms that passed through during the dark hours of night. I didn't mind those that occurred during the daylight hours because I could see what was happening; but at night, the lightening and the thunder scared me. As soon as I heard the first rumbles of thunder, I got up and closed all the windows and pulled the curtains closed tight.

I then tried to fall back asleep. Most often I closed my eyes as tight as I could, and I buried one ear in my pillow while covering the other ear with my arm. I was afraid that lightening would strike somewhere in the house, or the wind would blow the glass in the windows to millions of tiny pieces. I prayed to God that He would keep us safe. Storms at night always scared me like that.

But, over the years that has changed. Night storms don't have quite the same effect on me. I still get up and shut the windows, but more often than not, now, I can fall right back to sleep after doing that. I don't understand the change. Maybe I'm losing my hearing or just getting smarter. Or maybe I have finally learned to trust God to watch over me and keep me safe during storms.

The storms of life, much like the storms at night were for me, and just as the storm the disciples encountered in the scripture I read to you, those storms can stir up similar feelings of fear and anxiety that the disciples and myself felt, especially when they sneak up on us and catch us unprepared. As the fury of the storms of life engulf us, negative stressful feelings can overwhelm us.

The magnitude of some of life's storms may push us to our limits and test out faith. Like people who don't know God, those of us who have been taught that God is always with us, even in the most difficult of times, may become susceptible to questioning whether we've been fed a

lie. We may feel abandoned by God, even angry with God, wondering whether God really does care about us. The storms of life potentially swallow us up leaving us with feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and loneliness.

Today's scripture tells us that the disciples were very afraid as the storm hit them. They feared for their lives. When they saw Jesus just lying there in the boat fast asleep, one thing they surely wondered was how Jesus could possibly sleep through such an awful storm; and secondly, they were angry that he wasn't helping them navigate the boats through the storm. Finally, they wake him and ask him, "Don't you care if we drown?"

The text doesn't tell us what kind of help the disciples were expecting from Jesus. Some of us might assume they expected Jesus to do some kind of a miracle to get them out of the storm, and maybe they did. We know they witnessed Jesus perform miracles of healing, turning water into wine, feeding a multitude of people with just a few fish and loaves of bread, and even casting out demons; but did they think he was capable of calming the storm?

Some commentary writers suggest that the disciples still did not have a good understanding of who Jesus was. They did not know him as the presence of God with us. Therefore, their reaction of fear and anger is reflective of an old-world view of God; they believed that God was absent and uninvolved with the world. So, it's very likely that when the disciples awakened Jesus, they simply wanted Jesus' help with navigating the boat, or at the very least, they wanted to know he cared.

I think, however, it is significant to note that in spite of all that they may have been feeling in those moments, they did turn to Jesus. This is the turning point of the story. It's then Mark tells us that Jesus somehow calmed the storm and then he turned to his disciples and asked, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Even though Jesus questioned the depth of their faith, don't miss the significance of the point that they did turn to Jesus for help. That's key. The same thing is true for us when the storms of life hit us. We may be fearful, anxious, angry, feeling uncertain about the future, even questioning whether God cares about us, but when we turn to God in spite of all those feelings, we actually crack open the door to our great 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." Can you say the same?

Faith in God begins and strengthens when we reach out to him, even though we may have doubts. Small as it may seem to be, this kernel of faith opens our spirit to recognizing the presence of God who calms us and guides us through the storm.

Let us not forget the other question Jesus asked his disciples? "Why are you afraid?" Obviously, Jesus wasn't shaken by the storm; he was able to sleep through it. Jesus wasn't afraid because he had confidence in God's care. Jesus didn't need the storm calmed to know that God was with him and would remain with him through the storm.

A man named Fock was a sailor in World War II. In one of his letters to home he wrote, "If you should hear that I have fallen in battle, do not cry. Remember that even the ocean in which my body sinks is only a pool in my Savior's hand." There is no promise that we'll be

delivered from trouble; but there is a promise that we are not alone in it. I think that's why Jesus could say, "Be not afraid." He knew he was not alone.

The reality is that God doesn't always end the storm; and I don't know why—none of us do—it's one of the mysteries of God, but when we turn to God in faith, even with a little faith, God can calm us.

In the Gardiner Museum in Boston there is a painting by Rembrandt entitled "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee." It is Rembrandt's interpretation of this scene. It shows panic etched on the faces of the disciples, as their small vessel is being raised up on a high wave, about to be crashed down. Two of the disciples are attempting to rouse Jesus who is asleep in the stern of the boat. But if you look more closely, you will discover that there is something that is not quite right. There are too many people in the picture. So, you count them. There are fourteen. There should only be thirteen (twelve disciples and Jesus). But instead, there are fourteen. It is then that you notice that one of the men in the boat is Rembrandt. He has painted himself into the picture. He has placed himself in the same boat.

Which is precisely what we should do. It is the way that we are supposed to interpret this passage. We are in the boat with Jesus, faithful but frightened. There is no immunity for any of us. We are caught up in the same fix. I suspect most of us would rather be numbered with the exceptions. Either we would like to believe that storms will never strike us or that faith will never fail us.

But storms will strike us because that's the way life is. Fix your eyes on Jesus, and hold on to him; Jesus will get you through it. Amen.