Calming the Seas
Sermon by Rev. Camille Mattick

Mark 4:35-41
On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

In our Gospel story this morning, we find Jesus and the disciples as they have increasingly been surrounded by large crowds and publicly challenged by religious leaders. Jesus had just finished teaching to a large crowd with a collection of parables on faith and the kingdom of God. And now, he and the disciples got on a boat so that they can do as Jesus had requested and go to the “other side”. I imagine Jesus was and even the disciples were trying to find a moment of peace, a few moments to get away from the crowds, to rest and be replenished. Then, while they were on the boat, a storm comes out of nowhere. As the storm intensified fear and panic filled the disciples. What was going to happen, what were they going do? And through all of this, Jesus was unconcerned, or so the disciples thought, since he was taking a nap on the deck showing no signs of noticing the storm or what was happening to them. It does not sound like the kind of boat ride they or we would want to be on.

And yet, we have found ourselves in similar predicaments. The world has a way of making waves appear suddenly. You may find yourself, like the disciples, in an unexpected storm this morning. Those storms can sometimes seem so large that we are frozen in fear. Storms caused by broken relationships, by economic uncertainty, by the frailness of our humanity, by deep and profound loss and pain. There are all kinds of storms that we may find ourselves in the middle of.

The fear that the disciples felt that morning was not just for the overwhelming waves---it was because Jesus appeared not to be even remotely aware of the storm. He was sleeping through it! And they rushed over to him and woke him up, panic in their voices, accusing Jesus of not caring for them or their situation. Jesus sensing the panic and fear in his disciples voices rose to calm the storm. PEACE he said. BE STILL. And suddenly everything stopped. Then he turned to the disciples, who are shocked and amazed, and instead of providing further comfort, he chastised them. "Why are you afraid? Do you still not have faith?"

The dramatic side of me often sees this scene in my head----like a great CGI movie clip. We open on a wide panoramic view of a rough sea. We zoom to one lone boat lost in the large overbearing waves. There is dark clouds and thunder and lightning as we focus on individual men as they cling to the side of the boat as it rises and tosses on the waves, their hair blowing wildly, their faces anguish and contorted in fear. And then we shift suddenly to Jesus, dressed all in white (of
course), his hair surprising still not even dampened by the storm, as he walks undisturbed by the waves and unsteadiness of the boat, to the mast where he lifts his hand and loudly and confidently yells PEACE. Immediately----the waves stop, the dark clouds roll away, and as the sun returns and the seagulls chirp, the men still clinging to the side of the boat slowly glance around, take a deep breath, and begin to let go.

I am fairly certain that my imagination while vivid, does not give what is the most accurate depiction of what happened on the boat. But I think, sometimes, some of the storms we find ourselves trapped in, feel and are that desperate. The storms of life come in all sizes. There are small and large waves. But no matter the size of our storm, like the disciples, we desperately want to know that Jesus cares of us.

I will confess this morning that while our passage from Mark is a Lectionary passage, I chose to preach from it this week because it is words I need to hear this morning. I find myself in some rocky and unknown waters---and I need to hear Jesus speak “peace” to the chaos I feel inside. This morning is my last Sunday with this beloved community and as I transition to a new position in a church that is directly next door to my house and family----I find myself in the midst of waves of chaos and fear. My waters are just a little bit choppy. Transitions—even positive ones---can be scary. At least they are for me.

Even as I transition into a church community I know somewhat well and prepare to work with a new Senior pastor whom I know far too well----I still find myself fearful of the unknown and saddened to leave the well known. Will this new position and ministry work? Will I be seen and known as a pastor in a community where I have primarily be known as Andy’s wife? Will I be able to meet their needs and the needs of the community? Can I learn to be in ministry without a 90 minute commute each way?

Oh, how I will genuinely miss my ministry here: the miracles that occur during Tech week for CAST, the weekly (or daily) pastoral care walks for coffee with Pastor Robert, the conversations with children as we walk down the ramp to Sunday School. Oh, how I will miss this beloved community.

As excited as I am about my new ministry appointment, there are waves of doubt, waves of fear, and waves of sadness that can be overwhelming. I need Jesus to awaken and speak peace to my fears. But I can also hear his question..."why are you scared? Have you no faith?" Like our Gospel story Jesus leaves us not just with peace but he also has questions for us too. I think Jesus’ response to the Disciples--and to us--his question of their faith and ours is two-fold. First, and foremost, Jesus expects them to understand that while he may not have been in a panic with them on the boat, he was still there---on the boat---with them--in the storm.

There is a calming presence in the idea that no matter where we are---God is with us. Our psalm this morning speaks to that so beautifully.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol (shay ol). , you are there. If I take
the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

It has been my practice every week in Preschool chapel to ask for volunteers from each class to light and extinguish the candles. As I assist the children to light the candles at the start of chapel, we talk every week, that we light the candles as a reminder that God is there—in the chapel, with us in that moment. When we sing, when we pray, when we hear the Bible stories—God is with us. At the conclusion of chapel, when two children extinguish the candles, we talk that we do so to help us remember that wherever we go God goes with us. God does not stay in the chapel. God goes with us when return to the classroom, when we go to the playground, our homes, and even as one of our preschoolers reminded me one Thursday, God is even with us when we go to the bathroom.

That reminder of God’s constant presence is with us this morning. Our acolytes carry in the light of Christ, a symbol of God’s presence among us, and they carry it out as we leave. A reminder that no matter how rough the seas are, we are not alone. When we choose to follow Christ, we are given no promise of a life without a storm. In fact, getting on the boat with Jesus might even bring on greater occurrences of storms. Following Christ is not an easy or peaceful adventure. What we have been promised, is that as we follow Jesus, when the storm waves are high, Jesus is right there with us.

This is an important part of the Gospel story: Jesus isn’t somewhere else. He isn’t sitting on the shore watching the scene unfold. He is in the boat with the disciples—sinking. And then he calms the storm. When Jesus asks the disciples “have you no faith?” he is really reminding them, like the ritual of lighting and extinguishing the preschool chapel candles, that they are truly never alone. There is no place we can be without God.

However, I think beyond that, there is a second reminder in Jesus’ question of his disciple’s faith. Jesus is reminding them that part of faith is to remember not just who is with them, but who they are and whose they are. In the middle of the storm, the disciples had forgotten that they were a beloved of God, that they had been called and gifted. Just 2 short chapters following this story, Jesus is going to send them out to do ministry and miracles in his name. When the waves were high, the disciples forgot what was at stake. You see, Faith is not passive. I find myself believing that part of Jesus’ frustration with the disciples’ panic is not solely that they did not have faith in Jesus…but that they did not have faith in themselves. Faith is so much more than belief in Jesus. Faith is so much more than trusting Jesus to wake up and calm the storm. Faith requires you to know who you are and whose you are. Faith requires knowing that God works not just for you—but through you.

When the storm is rocking our boat that can be a very hard thing to remember. When the waves are high, we are too busy clinging to the side the boat to take action. A difficult aspect of faith is that sometimes, we need to do more than just cling to the side of the boat until Jesus wakes up from his nap. Sometimes, in some storms, we have to let go of the boat too. Faith is not passive. Yes, Jesus is on the boat and in the storm with us. But the storm ends and we eventually have to get off the boat. There is no one who is not called or gifted by God. We are all called to be kingdom builders. To be agents of grace and love in a world that needs grace and love desperately. But when life is stormy, we forget who and whose we are.
As I transition into my new ministry at Simi Valley, I take with me a gift from the CAST group. It is a beautiful charm bracelet, which I am wearing this morning. On it are charms that represent each of the plays that have been preformed while I have been here at FUMC—including the adult productions. There is a Don Quixote Book for Man of LaMancha. Red slippers for Wizard of Oz. A Methodist cross and flame for Cotton Patch Gospel. A bucket for Annie. And a Lion for Narnia. Each charm serves as a reminder of the process that we all went through in each production. I cherish it. And as I look upon it I am reminded of the transformative power of that ministry—on the lives of the children, youth, and adults involved. I am reminded of the how God’s love and grace shaped our experiences.

In that spirit, there are many charms that I would add that would represent the ways this beloved community has shaped and formed my ministry. A Hymnal charm to remind me of the power and transformative nature of worship. A Bible charm to remind me of how discipleship is fed by relatable and applicable Bible study. A basin and towel charm, symbols of service and mission, to remind me of the ways in which individuals and community can truly transform the world around us. A team banner charm to remind me of what a blessing it is to be part of an amazing pastoral team. For the many things I have learned and the many ways I have grown while working with Patricia and Robert. I would leave with these charms and these reminders of this beloved community gifted by God.

A part of the challenge of a life of faith, is not just believing in Jesus when the waves are high but remembering that as we leave the boat, God has placed a call on each of our lives. When the storms clouds appear, we must remember not just that Jesus is on board, but that we gifted to do what God asks of us.

So, maybe you find yourself in a storm today---maybe with large waves, maybe with small waves. Maybe the storm just died down. Maybe the storm clouds are on the horizon. But as I leave you today, I give you the same challenge I gave the children: Remember that God is with you wherever you go. Remember that you are a gifted child of God called to transform the world. Remember that God loves you always. And remember, that I love you too.

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