

Sermon Series “When the Spirit Moves”

Sermon Title “Enduring the Storms”

Mark 4:³⁵⁻⁴¹

³⁵That evening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the east side."
³⁶So they left the crowd, and his disciples started across the lake with him in the boat. Some other boats followed along. ³⁷Suddenly a windstorm struck the lake. Waves started splashing into the boat, and it was about to sink.

³⁸Jesus was in the back of the boat with his head on a pillow, and he was asleep. His disciples woke him and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?"

³⁹Jesus got up and ordered the wind and the waves to be quiet. The wind stopped, and everything was calm.

⁴⁰Jesus asked his disciples, "Why were you afraid? Don't you have any faith?"

⁴¹Now they were more afraid than ever and said to each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

A man was driving to work when a truck drove through a stop sign, hit his car broadside, and knocked him out. Passersby pulled him from the wreck and revived him. He began a terrific struggle and had to be tranquilized by the medics. Later, when he was calm, they asked him why he struggled so. He said, "I remember the impact, then nothing. I woke up on a concrete slab in front of a huge, flashing SHELL sign. And somebody was standing in front of the S."

We can't get through life without experiencing something that upsets us or brings terror to our lives. In an article entitled, "I Have No Idea," Jill H. Valentine writes,

Everyone struggles to make sense of life at times. Bad things happen; illness strikes; fighting breaks out; war begins. None of it seems to be decipherable at the time. We feel as if chaos is emerging and there is little that we can do to put it in order. So we fight. We wrestle to overcome the doubt, the fear, the unknown. We try to put the blame and the work somewhere else. And we are left in the dark. David Hansen, in his book *The Art of Pastoring*, tells of the struggle he had to understand a nursing home patient. “Daisy was a stroke victim in her 80s. She lived in a wheelchair. Daisy was aphasiac; she couldn’t talk straight. I couldn’t understand a word she said, but her aphasia wasn’t her problem, it was my problem. I had to figure out what she was saying.” It is often our problem, our task, to figure out what God is trying to tell us when we wrestle with events in our lives.

Jesus and his disciples have been working hard teaching a crowd of people by the sea of Galilee. Jesus was sharing about God’s coming rule in the world. He uses parables to describe the Kingdom of God. Later Jesus, would explain the meaning of the parables to his disciples. It must have been exhausting for Jesus. They leave in a boat and Jesus falls asleep.

A great windstorm arises. Storms happen. Sometimes you see them coming and sometimes you don’t. Stormy times in life happen that way too.

Throughout the Old Testament the sea symbolizes chaos. People who traveled by boat would be scared of what lies beneath the water. Also, people in those times did not take swimming lessons. If you fell overboard you would drown if you could not keep your head above water while waiting for a rescue. This is why the disciples are scared. They might lose their lives in the storm.

In 1975, the Edmund Fitzgerald went down, and songwriter Gordon Lightfoot recorded a haunting ballad in honor of, and as a tribute to, the

ship and the men who lost their lives. He called it “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”

The Edmund Fitzgerald was a giant ore freighter, 729 feet in length, and was the largest carrier on the Great Lakes from 1958 until 1971. The Fitzgerald was labeled “the pride of the American Flag.”

On November 10, 1975, the Fitzgerald was hauling a heavy load of ore to Detroit, Michigan, when it ran into a severe storm. This storm generated 27-30 foot waves with a following sea (which means the waves are moving in the same direction as the boat). During the evening hours the ship disappeared from radar screens; apparently it sank in a matter of minutes. It now rests on the bottom of Lake Superior broken in two with the bow upright and the stern upside down still loaded with its cargo of ore and all 29 hands. In Gordon Lightfoot’s ballad about the sinking of the freighter Edmund Fitzgerald, he asks: “Does anyone know where the love of God goes/When the waves turn the minutes to hours?”

The disciples are panicking. They are afraid. They wonder if God’s love for them has gone somewhere else.

Psalm 74:13 shares, “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.” God is praised by the psalmist for dividing the sea to get at those creatures in the sea. God’s power is also remembered during the time of the Exodus. The palmist remembers the parting of the Red Sea. From Psalm 106:9, “He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry; he led them through the deep as through a desert.” God’s manipulations of the seas are acts of redemption.

Notice that the disciples don’t ask Jesus to do anything. They don’t say, “We need help right now.” As the Reverend Dr. Steven Weber puts it,

No, what they say is infinitely more offensive to Jesus. It is evidence that they have been dozing through disciple class, their minds wandering as Jesus patiently walked them through his history and his mission. Worse than that, they missed the class motto, the mission statement, the center of everything. They forgot the most famous verse in all of the Gospels: "For God so loved the world" . . . so loved. "Don't you care?" They shouted that in their fear. They lost their grip on the main truth about Christ. "Don't you care?" You might as well shout at the birds in the air, "Don't you fly?" Or shout at the raindrops, "Don't you fall?" Or shake their fists at the sun and ask, "Don't you shine?" Don't you care? Of course, he cares. That's why he's there sleeping on a cushion because he is exhausted from caring for everyone everywhere. Of course, he cares.

This isn't a story about calming storms. It is a story of faith. After rebuking the storm in the same way he rebukes demons, Jesus gets to the point of faith. They have been with him and experienced healings. They listen to his words. It's like what Weber says, "They have been dozing through disciple class."

A man trusted his wife completely. He and his wife were sitting in the living room and he said to her, "Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug." His wife got up, unplugged the TV and threw out all of his beer.

Even though the storm is gone the disciples are still afraid. "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Remember, it takes getting to the end of Mark's Gospel to understand who Jesus is. It is a Roman soldier who says, "Truly this man was God's son!"

There are times in our lives when we face storms. We wonder if God is asleep. We wonder if we will find help. It is our faith, our trust that Jesus

came to be with us to help us in our lives. We need to have courage to face what is before us – we look to Jesus for help. Jesus will calm some of our storms. Jesus will not calm all of our storms. We have to trust that Jesus knows which storms need calming.

Augustine, in his Sermons, 63.1-3, shares,

When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is aroused, you are being tossed by the waves. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled, your heart is taking a battering. On hearing yourself insulted, you long to retaliate; but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten his presence. Rouse him, then; remember him, let him keep watch within you, pay heed to him . . . A temptation arises: it is the wind. It disturbs you: it is the surging of the sea. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let him remind you of these words: "Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey him."

We trust Jesus because others have trusted him before us. We trust him because he is trustworthy. We trust him because he died for us. We trust him because he has demonstrated his love for us. We trust him because his word is true.

As a church we need to help those who are in the boat with us. We must wake up to the needs of people in our community and throughout the world.

One more thing to notice is that there were other boats following. If any of the disciples did fall overboard someone would be close to rescue the disciple. We not only have Jesus to help us endure the storms of life, we

have each other to rely on as well. We don't need to go through storms alone.

Drought threatened the crop in a village of Crete. The priest told his flock: "There isn't anything that will save us, except a special litany for rain. Go to your homes, fast during the week, trust in God, and come on Sunday for the litany of rain."

The villagers heard him, fasted during the week and went to the church on Sunday morning, but as soon as the priest saw them, he was furious. He said, "Go away, I will not do the litany. You do not trust in God."

"But Father," they protested, "we fasted and we trust."

"Trust?" he said. "Then where are your umbrellas?"

We are invited to place our trust in Jesus to get us through life! Amen.