



Sunday June 13, 2024
Mark 4:35-41 (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Have you ever wondered why so many stories with Jesus seem to include an impending sense of danger that lies ahead? Knowing this then, there's just something uncomfortable and unappealing about hearing, "*When evening had come,*" and "*let's go across to the other side*".

Today's gospel sounds more like pages taken from the script of a suspense movie than from scripture. I can almost picture Jesus saying, "*Hey, let's go into the cellar of this old house,*" or "*Why don't we check out this abandoned building,*" or "*Let's head toward that creepy cabin in the woods.*" And then I fully expect one of the disciples to turn toward the camera and say, "*I've got a bad feeling about this.*"

In today's gospel Jesus says to his disciples, "*Let us go across to the other side.*" And what I want to know is...*why?* What's over there that's so important? Why do they have to go over to the other side...*especially* at night...and especially when a storm is brewing?

More often than not, if it were completely up to us then we'd rather stay right where we are. We don't necessarily *want* to "hear" Jesus' invitation to go to the other side, because for most of us it means journeying through a storm and it's much easier to stay in our comfort zone and remain in what we know.

So we sit. And we wait. But for what? The right time? For someone else to make the first move? For God to give us a sign that nothing difficult is going to happen?

Maybe this is why Jesus doesn't give the disciples any time to think about the trip.

For the disciples and for us, Jesus doesn't seem interested in letting us stay on one side of the lake for too long. If the disciples had said to Jesus, "*What if there's a storm?*" – they might never have gotten into the boat.

If the disciples had said to Jesus, "*tell us what's on the other side first*" – they might never have gotten into the boat. Perhaps the act of faith is not only trusting that Jesus will be with them and still the storm, but more importantly the act of faith is taking Jesus' invitation to heart, getting into the boat, *and* believing that the other side is not only possible, but it's also essential to the abundant life God promises.

I'd like to point out a few important lessons from today's gospel. The first one is that **Storms will come**. The apostle Peter reminds us, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*" The disciples seem to be shocked that they were in the position they were in. But wasn't Jesus *with* them? Wouldn't God protect his Messiah, and also protect his followers? How could this be happening?

I'm always amazed by the number of people who have the same feeling of shock when some storm comes into their lives. *Didn't I do all the right things? Doesn't God protect those God loves? How can this be happening to me?* I'm pretty sure these same questions were running through the minds of the disciples.

There are some of you here today in whose life a storm is raging. For some of you it's financial – maybe it's a job loss or the struggle to keep up with all the bills. For others it's a health issue – maybe it's an unexpected diagnosis, a struggle with an addiction, or a recent decline in your health.

Or perhaps it's being overwhelmed in the area of a relationship – maybe it's the loss of a longtime friendship or a marriage that's falling apart. You've tried to be a good person and do the right thing, and yet you feel like you're sinking, and you want to know the same thing the disciples wanted to know – *Jesus, don't you care? Are you even aware of what I'm going through?*

But allow me a moment to tell you what a storm in your life *does not* mean. It does not mean that God doesn't love you. It does not mean that God is angry with you, or that God is paying you back for something you did or didn't do – and God is most definitely not just playing games with you. Sometimes the storms that happen in our lives are self-made, but many times the storms are just part of life – and trying to analyze what happened or assign blame is counterproductive. We live in a broken world, where both good and bad things happen and the *why* is not always understandable. However, what remains important is how we respond to them.

The next lesson of this story is – **Jesus is with us in the storm**. Jesus could have stayed on the shore and let the disciples take all the chances by themselves, but he didn't. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "*You go over to the other side,*" instead Jesus says, "*Let us go over to the other side.*" Jesus was there all along, no matter what he was doing, whether he was preaching, teaching, or sleeping in the boat.



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The problem for the disciples wasn't that he was or wasn't with them, but that he was asleep. The disciples interpreted his sleeping as a lack of caring. They wondered how he could sleep through the storm, and especially how he could sleep when they were in danger. They expected him to be attentive to their needs even in his sleep. And we've all been there, haven't we? You're in the middle of a crisis and it seems like God is off somewhere taking a nap. God doesn't seem interested or responsive to your need. At least we can know that we're in the same boat as the disciples. But what is Jesus' response when they wake him up? Well, after he rebukes the storm, he rebukes his disciples. He asks them two questions: "*Why are you so afraid?*", and "*Do you still have no faith?*"

Maybe you were expecting a different response from Jesus. That Jesus would've shown a little compassion and at least asked them "*What are you so afraid of?*" And the disciples might have answered, *Oh, I don't know, maybe it was the storm that was raging around us, or the violent pitching of the boat, or the water swamping the boat so that it was starting to sink. Maybe it was that we thought we were about to die! You know, just stuff like that Jesus. Don't you think we had a right to be anxious?*

But Jesus was hoping that what they had seen and experienced him do in the past would have provided them with a stronger faith in the future, but that wasn't the case. So, first Jesus had to calm the storm, and then he had to calm his disciples.

One final lesson I'd like to share with you about this gospel story is that, **It's often in the storm that we truly begin to understand who Jesus is.** I think the most amazing part of this story is the disciple's reaction to Jesus. When Jesus asks them why they're afraid, it's the Greek word meaning moderately fearful that describes them, but when Jesus calms the storm, the Bible says, "They were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obeys him!'"

This literally translates to, "they feared with great fear." While they may have been afraid of the storm, they were even more terrified of Jesus. Their fear of the storm was nothing compared with the fear they had when they realized who it really was who was with them in the boat. It's one thing to be in the boat with someone you believe was sent from God to be a great teacher and spiritual leader. But it's quite another thing to be in the boat with the One whom you suddenly realize is the Lord of the universe.

We don't really understand who Jesus is or the power he has until we see him in action. It must have been terrible to be blind, but the blind man couldn't see who Jesus was until he was healed. The deaf man couldn't hear Jesus until his ears were opened. And the paralyzed man was finally able to leap and dance when he fully trusted Jesus.

It is often in moments of crisis that we truly come to understand who Jesus is. And when we place our complete faith and trust in Jesus, then we too are able to have a greater understanding of him, a deeper relationship with him, and a new love for him once the storm is over. We can begin to see his power over darkness and the true depth of his love for us. Jesus told his disciples and he's telling us that God wants us to live by faith, not by fear.

As we encounter the inevitable storms of life – we long for peace, we search for quiet, calm and contentment in the midst of the storms, the chaos, and the uncertainties of life.

We call out to Jesus just as the disciples did in that sinking boat. *God, where are you? God, are you sleeping? God, do you hear me? God, why don't you answer me?* And God's answer, *I am here with you...I have always been with you, and I will always be with you.*

Jesus was not afraid because he had complete trust in the Father to protect and provide for Him and he wanted his disciples and wants us to have that very same peace. A reassurance that no matter what circumstances in life we may find ourselves, God is in control. Peace will come. The disciples saw the power of God as Jesus calmed the storm. And there is a peace to life – a peace that passes all understanding when we believe in and trust in the power of God to be with us and guide us through all the storms of life. The disciples were afraid because they could only see the storm.

And as we journey through the chaos of life, we need not be afraid because God is always with us. It doesn't mean that he will take away all the problems. But out of overwhelming love for us God offers us peace in the midst of the chaos of life with these reassuring words– Peace, be still. I am with you always. Thanks be to God. Amen.