

Redwoods Presbyterian Church
June 21, 2015
Mark 4:35-41
Out of the Comfort Zone
Rev. Stephanie Ryder

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 windstorm 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?"

Of all the stories in the New Testament, the passage read today of Jesus calming the storm is perhaps the most symbolic of the Christian church. Throughout the history of Christianity, disciples have read this story and applied it to their own lives. The passage begins with Jesus proposing to his disciples that they go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. This may sound innocuous enough, but this wasn't just another fishing expedition... the other side of the Sea of Galilee was the Gerasenes, the land of the Gentiles, and likely, that alone implies that they are about to enter some dangerous waters. They are going into foreign territory. Jesus was taking them on a mission in which they would be out of their comfort-zone. The disciples go for it--they leave the crowd behind, and take Jesus in the boat. The Scripture says, "They took him in the boat just as he was." Hmm. *Just as he was*. Intriguing. Perhaps what the writer of Mark is saying is that there were no fancy accessories. No shields, no weapons, no magic wands, no crystal balls, no emergency funds from the bank account, no suitcase with foul weather gear, no promise of fancy hotel reservations or keys to a rental car. Just Jesus, just as he was.

A great windstorm arises, causing waves to crash into the boat, threatening to sink it. The disciples are terrified. They're used to storms on the sea, but nothing like this one. Where is Jesus? Oh! He's asleep on a cushion, in the back of the boat. I'm guessing this was a bit disconcerting to the disciples. They wake him up, saying, "Aren't you concerned that we're being destroyed and about to die?" Jesus awakens and scolds the wind and commands the waves to settle down. "Peace! Be still," he says, and suddenly all is calm, at least with the wind and the waves. Apparently the command doesn't have the same effect on the disciples. In the psalm read today, when the Lord calms the stormy seas of those who cry out for help, they're glad because they have quiet, and have been brought to their desired haven, and so they respond with praise and thanksgiving. The disciples in the gospel story...not so much. They are still full of fear.

Jesus asks them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” They’re like, “Who is this guy? Even the wind and the sea obey him?” He had healed the sick and lame and cast out evil spirits, but this was really something. If they were fearful or skeptical about the mission to the other side or that they’d make it through the storm, they’re seemingly just as skeptical and fearful about who he is, and what gives him the authority to control the wind and the waters. No praise and thanksgiving noted. They seem to be still out of their comfort zone.

The part of the church we are sitting in is called the nave. Nave is the Latin word for “ship.” Let’s consider ourselves, then, the disciples in the boat, who are being called out of our comfort zones. I know for some of you, this Father’s Day may be difficult. There are those among us who are going through this first Father’s Day without fathers or without husbands who were fathers. There are those among us who have lost sons or brothers who were fathers or who were taken from life before being able to become fathers.

Dan Christian, former pastor at St. Luke Presbyterian Church in San Rafael, lost his wife, Laura, to a 10-year battle with cancer just a couple of days ago. This Father’s Day, Dan is a single dad to his 6 year-old daughter. There are those left fatherless and fathers grieving the loss of loved ones after the senseless shooting and killing of nine people in a Bible study in Charleston. These are some serious storms. There are storms in the greater church community, storms in our world, storms in our personal lives. Some of us are leaving or losing a job or a home, in difficult relationships, experiencing health challenges, have worries over children or elderly parents, anxiety about being alone, and fear of death – our own, and that of our loved ones. Like the disciples, we want to jolt awake a sleeping Jesus and cry out, “Hello?!! Can’t you see we’re suffering here, about to go down? Wake up, please, and do something!!”

Perhaps we believe the miracle is in the ability to control the weather, to control the raging storm around us and make it stop. We want God to be our sorcerer, who magically makes things happen. Maybe the Mark passage isn’t as much a story about Jesus’ ability to control the weather, as it is how God remains present with us through an overwhelming storm. Can we trust that Jesus, just as he is, can bring us to a place of comfort and calm like we’ve never seen or known? God’s power is revealed in coming alongside us, journeying with us, suffering with us, and staying with us in the boat when the storms come. Perhaps the miracle in the story is that Jesus was with the disciples in the water-logged and weather-beaten boat, experiencing the same terrible storm, the same terrible waves, the same terrible danger, and he was able to rest in it.

My parents are boaters. They started sailing when I was in grade school. My mom, with her organizational skills, keeps things in perfect ship-shape. My dad, an engineer, understands the fine details of the control panels, the navigation maps, the

amount of sail to let out, the physics of the wind, when to tack. As a passenger on their boat, I can just relax. One summer, I was home from college and they were living at the time in Houston, Texas. I joined them and some of their sailor friends for a sail on Galveston Bay. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day, clear skies. I was a teenager, and thus... very tired! So I went down into the berth to take a nap. I honestly don't remember if it was before or after my decision to nap that the grey clouds and fierce, whipping winds of the storm arose, but I recall my mother commenting that she couldn't believe I could sleep through what appeared to be a hurricane upon us. I arose and found people panicking and moving around very fast, bringing in the sails, battening down the hatches.

What I remember of my father that day, when everyone else seemed panic-stricken, was of him standing at the helm, looking forward fearlessly, maybe even the slightest hint of an adventurer's smile on his face. I was completely confident that we would arrive safely at the dock. I wasn't worried for a second about that storm. It never occurred to me that we were in danger. Maybe I didn't know enough about sailing to know the trouble we were in, but I knew enough about my dad to know we were going to be okay. He knew exactly what needed to be done, and he would see to it that it was. I trusted him completely.

I think this is why Jesus, too, was able to sleep in the midst of the storm -- because he had complete confidence and trust in his Father, the Father of us all, the Creator God. He knew they would make it one way or another to the other side. Having Jesus in our boat does not mean that we won't encounter storms in our lives; indeed, it is likely just the opposite. Because when we're followers of Jesus, we're called to go to some difficult places, places that challenge us to leave our comfort zones -- to embark on a path of healing that is intense or scary, to reach out a hand to someone we've been conditioned to fear, to forgive when it's more comfortable to hold on to the hatred or resentment. Jesus invites us to do risky, bold, daring things outside our comfort zones, and then he partners with us through them. He offers us a calming presence for which we can be thankful. When we take Jesus in our boat, he always brings us to the other side, through the storm. As the Compassionate Kids asked and answered in our group and here in the service last week, "How does knowing that Jesus is always with you make a difference in your life? You don't have to be afraid. How does knowing that Jesus is always with you make a difference in your life? He can get you through any situation." Jesus invites us to go on a journey, we say yes, take him in our boat, and then trust he's going to see us through any storm. Friends, we're in the boat. Jesus is with us. I invite you to accept the peace that Christ offers, without reservation. Jesus is in the boat. Let's go where we are called to go!

