

6/20/21

Faith in the Midst of a Storm

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

Our reading this morning from Mark's Gospel has always intrigued me... on the one hand, (as a Sandy survivor – and perhaps even with the Pandemic) I can relate to the experience (the disciples had) with the storm that suddenly arose out of nowhere... and on the other hand, I can still remember the boat trip we took a few years ago (on that same body of water) while on a pilgrimage to Israel...

It was a short boat trip (that I took about twelve years ago with a Christian tour group from Connecticut) – meant to help us better appreciate the life of our Lord Jesus and his teachings... what I remember the most about that evening was how beautiful it was... it was in late February/early March (and the large orange sun was setting in a beautiful, dark blue sky – with diamonds dancing on the surface of the lake)...

But what I took away with me that evening was how our tour guide mentioned that *that* was what was deceiving about the Sea of Galilee... everything can be calm and beautiful one moment – (but when the cool air comes in from the West and touches the much warmer water below) – it can also create very strong winds... and as coastal people ourselves - we know that with strong winds - come big waves...

And the tour guide explained that was what was happening in the story from Mark's Gospel... When Jesus and the disciples got into the boat that evening everything seemed calm (calm enough for them to get into the boat)... but then only a little while later the Bible tells us that a great windstorm arose on the sea – threatening to overturn the boat (and to drown them all)...

So, let's stop there for a moment and ask ourselves, "Why did the author of Mark feel that it was important for us to know that story?"... And even more importantly – what does it mean for us today (as 21st Century people)?...

Well, this is just my opinion but I've always felt that this story is a good reflection of life itself (isn't it?)... and what I mean is that just like it was for the disciples who set out on that evening (to get to the other side) even life itself can seem so calm one moment (and then very frightening and unpredictable the next)... because like it is on the Sea of Galilee, even today, storms can come without warning into our lives as well...

A good example is one that we see so often - a person who works so hard their entire career (hoping to finally enjoy 'life' in retirement) – only to get sick instead... a young couple finally purchases the home of their dreams – and then one of them loses a job... or your own daughter or son starts a family (only to find themselves getting a divorce) – and then moving back home (with your grand kids in tow)...

The point I'm trying to make is that life is as unpredictable as a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee... We never know when the tides of life are going to change – or when our plans are going to be disrupted and disturbed... and it doesn't matter your age, your social status, the color of your skin, or the number of times you come to church (or even how faithful you think you are) – storms can come when you least expect them...

And if you've ever found yourself experiencing the storms of life then you also know how frightening those experiences can be... because when your life threatens to be turned upside down it takes away your certainty of the future – and it can also make you feel helpless – and at times – it can also make you feel hopeless...

You know, those were the feelings that the disciples had when they were encountering their own storm... they wondered that evening (in the boat) if they were going to die... if they were going to go under... if they'd drown and never come up again... in fact, they even ask Jesus, "*Do you not care that we are perishing?*"... (as they find him in the back of the boat (not only relaxed) but it tells us that he was asleep on a cushion – without a worry in the world...

But notice how Jesus responds – he asks, "*Why are you afraid?*"... in another translation it says, "*Take courage!*"... And then asks a very interesting question... he says, "*Have you still no faith?*"...

In other words, one of the messages of this story is to trust in Jesus (even when life is scary and uncertain)... it's telling us to keep the faith in the power of the Lord to calm things once again... and reminding us that God is much bigger (than all of our problems)...

And if we were to paraphrase Jesus' response (and apply it to our own storms in life) – Jesus would be telling us, "*No matter what you're going through right now (I will get you over to the other side)*"... "*I haven't left you – I haven't abandoned you – but I need you to keep calm and know that we're not only going to get there*

(on time) - but we're going to get there together" ... because God is bigger than our problems...

In fact, in Matthews Gospel - you probably remember how Peter (one of Jesus' disciples) hears that same message and decides to take Jesus at his word (by stepping out of the boat - and does what is seemingly impossible at first - and he begins walking on water)...

And the great part of that story is that even Peter falls short in his faith (at one point) and begins to sink back into hopelessness and despair... but the Grace in all of this is not whether or not we sink or swim... instead, God's Grace is made known by reminding us that Jesus is always there reaching out once again for our hand... (always ready to save those who put their trust in him)...

And friends, the point I'm trying to make this morning is that there are many storms that can arise in our lives - some might be surprised with an illness, some lose jobs or careers or even loved ones, some are left heartbroken when a marriage comes to an abrupt end... but whatever storm arrives in your own life - the goal that we should all keep *front and center at all times* is to trust that God will be with us... to trust that God is right here in the boat alongside of us... that God is bigger than our problems...

and that no matter what may threaten our peace today (God has promised us long ago that He will get us to the other side)... and not because we deserve to get there - but because God loves us (as a parent loves a child)...

You know, being that it's Father's Day I was remembering one of my favorite Father's Day stories that has always helped me to remember what it's like to trust our own Father in Heaven (with all that we have) when the storms of life arise in our own lives... and what our faith might look like when we do...

It's a story of when we went over to China to adopt our oldest daughter, Erin... she was 9 months old and the cutest baby in the world (at least she was to me)... and if you know anything about the adoption process - you know that it involves a lot of transition... transition for the parents (but even more importantly - transition for the child)...

And I remember how in the first few days of the adoption Erin was so much more comfortable with Nora than she was with me... and the way Erin's caregivers explained it was that for her whole life up to that point she had always been around women... in fact, all of her caregivers were females (and of course, all of the

babies were also little girls)... and for whatever reason – the caregiver reasoned that she wasn't as comfortable with me because I was a man...

But I was told to be patient – that one day there would be trust and that she would be the one to decide when that was...

And so, slowly over some time – as she was learning to trust me (she let me hold her – and then bounce her around)... but I remember I was sitting on the floor (one day) putting something together for her (and I called out to her) for her to look at what I was doing... *She was probably about 2 years old at this point...*

And as I called out to her she came up from behind me and jumped into my lap (knocking over what I was working on and surprising me – if you know what I mean)...

And because it was so unexpected I said, “Erin, why would you do that?”...

And she said, “Because you're my daddy!”...

And I share that story with you this morning because I think that is what faith looks like when we put all of our own trust in our Father in Heaven (the one Jesus taught us to call ‘Abba’ which means ‘Daddy’)...

And he taught us that even when the storms rage and our lives might feel like they're crumbling or falling apart (we don't run from God – or stray from Him with our heads bowed low) but instead we run to God (knowing that He is with us – that He loves us – and that He will never turn us away)... and we know – as Children of our Heavenly Father - that only He can calm the storms and bring us peace... only He can calm the winds... because our God is bigger than our problems... and only Jesus can get us to the other side...

May the presence of God fill your heart with love and joy... May His Word give you great courage in times of trial... and May the peace of the Lord be made known to you now and forever!... In Jesus' name we pray... **Amen!**