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Facing the Storms
Mark 4:35-41

I wonder, as we read our Gospel passage—if you would think about this:

What storms are you facing right now?

I want you to hear this story, one of the ***most FAMILIAR stories*** in the Gospels,
And listen—listen for those ***words*** that stand out to you.

Listen—for ***what God is saying to YOU, today.***

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”*³⁶ *And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.*³⁷ ***A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.***³⁸ *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?”*³⁹ *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.*⁴⁰ *He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”*⁴¹ *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?”*

PRAYER.

We all ***face so many fears***, don’t we?

Financial strains, family issues, job problems, health struggles, even death.

And ***fear is powerful***, isn’t it?

It’s a LOT like wind and waves beating against a boat!

It doesn’t really help for someone to say—*oh, there’s nothing to be afraid of!*

That’s something ***parents*** might say to a child

who is afraid of monsters under the bed.

But as adults, we know that ***monsters DO exist***—in many different forms, and there is plenty to be afraid of in life!

The ***wind and waves of life are REAL***. And frightening.

And Jesus doesn’t say---*don’t worry about those waves!*

There’s nothing to be afraid of!

No, Jesus responds to their fear by *calming the wind and waves!*

And then he says simply:

WHY are you afraid? Have you still no faith?

He wants them to know they don't have to fear...he is in control.

Because just as our Fear is real.

So is the power of God to calm our fear.

One of ***THE most popular phrases*** in the Bible is ***Do Not Fear.***

In fact, it's like the bookend of the Gospels—

we hear it when the angel announces her pregnancy to Mary,

and to the women at the empty tomb!

Do Not Fear.

Why are those words so ***important and powerful?***

It's because ***human life*** is fraught with fear—***our world is a scary place—***

Especially right now.

There's so much going on—the pandemic, the polarization, the racial and social injustice, the questions and confusion.

And people just aren't as kind and tolerant of each other.

So how is it possible to NOT be afraid?

That's where this story speaks to us.

We are all in a boat, and we all encounter the wind and waves.

But We are not alone.

Jesus is in the boat WITH US.

That makes ***all the difference.***

The disciples, since many of them were fishermen,

would have been quite ***familiar with boats, and the Sea*** of Galilee,

and its frequent storms and waves.

What was ***unfamiliar*** was having someone in the boat who could calm the waves!

The Sea of Galilee was a ***direct route*** between many of Jesus' ministry stops—so they used it to cross over.

But, crossing the Sea of Galilee was more than just crossing a body of water,

it was ***crossing from a Jewish area to a Gentile area—***

it was crossing from their familiar area of 'us'

to a foreign land of non-Jews, 'them'.

But this was essential--because Jesus' ministry went well beyond the Jews.

Isn't that interesting?

It's in this scenario that the disciples are so terrified.

How often are we like that?

Terrified because we are going into unfamiliar territory in life?

And when the storm comes to their boat,

And the boat is being swamped,

Jesus is on the boat.....*but he is ASLEEP!*

Asleep.

So they wake him with a question---*Do you not care that we are perishing?*

Ever felt like that--that *God is asleep while we're perishing?*

I know I have.

Maybe you feel that way right now!

When we consider all the personal tragedies we face,

and all the problems of our country and our world,

it's easy to feel that way, isn't it?

Talk about *frustration and anger*—

I mean if you're here God,

why aren't you doing something about this storm?

The disciples knew that Jesus was powerful.

But *what good is his power if he's asleep* in the bottom of a sinking boat?

Jesus' response is really amazing when you think about it.

He doesn't scold them.

He *RESCUES* them.

He is the Son of God, he has power over the wind and waves,

So, he *uses that power to save them.*

What does that mean to you, today?

Cancer survivor Reynolds Price wrote a book called, *Letter to a Man in a Fire.*

In it, Price tells of someone's experience of Jesus' presence during a storm.

She was facing exhausting medical tests in preparation for surgery.

And one day she had a vision.

"I went out along the Galilee hills and came to a crowd gathered around a man, and I stood on the outskirts intending to listen. But he looked over the crowd at me and then said, '**What do you want?**' And I said, 'Could you *send someone* to come with me and help me stand up after the tests because I can't manage alone?' He [Jesus] thought for a moment and then said, '**How would it be if I came?**'" Reynolds Price, *Letter to a Man in a Fire* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 30-1.

Isn't that great?

How WOULD it be if Jesus came—to you? To us?

Jesus has a whole different kind of presence, doesn't he?
He is *a non-anxious presence*.

In 1985 Edwin H. Friedman published a groundbreaking book called, "*Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*".
And that book became the gold standard for studying *the family dynamics of churches and synagogues*.

It's based on the family systems theory of Dr. Murray Bowen.

He saw how in dysfunctional families t

he most *anxious, troubled family members often 'led' the families*.

Friedman took that family theory and applied it to congregations,
while encouraging leaders in congregations to lead with a 'non-anxious presence',
and to be 'self-differentiated'.

In other words, instead of allowing the people most upset or anxious to hold all the power, *leaders can lead through peace, calm, and a sure sense of self*.

Think about it this way.

It's no secret that *those who have the most complaints, anger and fear often hold the most power* in a group.

Because they are usually the loudest voices.

But it's possible to step back from that and calmly steer an organization without giving in to the demands of those with the most anxiety, fear, or anger.

For Christians, we see this *calm leadership in Jesus*.

In this story, *Jesus is the non-anxious presence*—

asleep in the middle of the storm while everyone else was terrified,
and then calmly stilling the wind and the waves.

Now, none of us is Jesus.

So, a lot of people who study psychology and theology today, say that the best we can do is be *a low-anxious presence*.

But what a model, right?

Jesus is completely calm in the middle of the storms of life—
how can that calm us?

In her book, *Sailboat Church*,

Joan Gray talks about how churches *must prepare for the storms of life*.

We need to be *equipped for those storms*—
whatever they might be.

So how do we do that?

The most important thing we can do is **PRAY**.

This is how we *build the trust* we need in God's care, and calm and peace.

We pray.

Prayer is the way we *meet Jesus*.

She suggests that we specifically pray in *three ways*—

We pray with *expectation* that God will answer,

We pray to *recognize* the Spirit's presence and work around us,

And we pray to give *thanks* to God.

Expectation.

Recognition.

Thanksgiving.

She suggests that every church needs a group of people who pray regularly for the work of the church!

I wonder how could we make that happen here at FPC Matawan?

She also talks about how *testimonies*

are some of the most powerful things we can do and hear.

We need *stories of what God is doing* in our lives and in our church, stories that inspire and encourage us.

Joan Gray, *Sailboat Church*, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2014, Pg. 89.

I call these *God-sightings*.

We have stories like these in our *minutes for mission, and stewardship*.

Today we'll hear from *Bryan*.

We've heard inspiring stories from the *Mission* team over the past few months. You'll receive an inspiring letter from *Stacie* soon in the mail.

We need these stories, these God-sightings,
because they help us see God in our own lives!
They encourage us to see God at work in our church!

This is so important because we know that *storms will come*.
We will face hard times,
just *because we are trying to do God's work!*

We will also *face conflict* within the church—
it's normal and inevitable, because we're all human.
And we will *not always agree*.
The disciples themselves didn't always agree.

But conflict doesn't have to be bad—
it can be a way to GROW and learn together,
If we handle it with open communication,
with honesty, humility, and forgiveness,
just like Paul encourages in **Ephesians 4:32**:
be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
as God in Christ has forgiven you.

We can handle *conflict* if we take every situation to *God in prayer*.
We can handle the *storms* of life if we take everything to God in prayer.

We will all face storms, and times it might feel as though God is sleeping.
But *Jesus is in the boat with us*, and he is quick to save us.
He says to us, *How about if I come to help you?*

A few months ago I mentioned the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil, who suffered all of her short life from health problems. She fought in the Spanish Civil War and joined the French Resistance in World War II. During a time of great suffering, she experienced Christ's presence.

She writes in her book *Waiting for God*:

Christ himself came down and took possession of me...I had never foreseen the possibility...of a real contact, person-to-person, here below, between a human being and God.... in this sudden possession of me by Christ, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love" Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 69.

That's what we have.

The presence of God's LOVE—in the storms of life.

The *storms* may come.

But ***Jesus is with us.***

And he can calm any storm.

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel.***

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.