

Date: June 21, 2009

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

Title: “In the Same Boat”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Jesus and the disciples sail into a storm. The disciples are filled with fear. Jesus calms the storm. The disciples are filled with awe.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Jesus is the Son of God which means, among other things, power from his presence, just as he is. That’s good news.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

While sport fishing off the Florida coast, a tourist capsized his boat. He could swim, but his fear of alligators kept him clinging to the overturned craft. Spotting an old beachcomber standing on the shore, the tourist shouted, “Are there any gators around here?!” “Naw,” the man hollered back, “they ain’t been gators around here for years!” Feeling safer, the tourist started swimming leisurely toward the shore. About halfway there he asked the guy, “How’d you get rid of the gators?” “We didn’t do nothing’,” the beachcomber said. “The sharks got ‘em” (myboatclub.com). I imagine that man knew the feeling of fear.

Well, we get some water and fear in today’s Gospel lesson from Mark. Jesus invites his disciples to go with him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Although Mark indicates that Jesus invites them to sail, it is also clear that the disciples took Jesus with them “just as he was” (v. 36). Now we know the story, the disciples go sailing with Jesus and there is a storm. The boat becomes “swamped” (v. 37). The disciples are more than fearful. They are terrified. And Jesus sleeps.

Sleeps? Yes, sleeps. Jesus is curled up in the stern asleep “on the cushion” (v. 38). The disciples wake Jesus demanding and asking, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus wakes up, rebukes the wind, quiets the sea, and then asks the disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And with that Mark says that the disciples were filled with awe.

Now I have to share at this point, that today’s passage is a prime example of the reason I most wanted to go to Israel. I have been to the Sea of Galilee. As I worked with this passage over the last 10 days, I have been drawn back to the day that I stood on the bank of the Sea of Galilee and imagined Jesus and the disciples ministering around the lake and making their way across the lake. The day we were there, there had been a fierce wind storm, and the Sea had unusually high white caps. I pictured a boat in the middle of that water being tossed about with the petrified passengers aboard. It was as if I could literally crawl into the passage.

As I immersed myself in the passage imagining that windstorm and swamped boat, a couple of points struck me. First, this sailing thing was Jesus’ idea. The disciples are in the boat, turned into the storm, at his invitation. Is it odd that Jesus would invite the disciples to sail with him into the storm? A first glance we might say yes. But on the other hand maybe not. I ask you to consider this idea.

There are many in the world today that have sailed into a storm with Jesus and it is always at his invitation. Whose idea was it to care for the aging parent or relative? Why reach out to help another in need? Where did the thought come from to serve at the food pantry, the thrift store or Community Café? We don’t do

that just because we think it is a good way to spend a Monday or a Friday. We have been invited to go to those places; invited by Jesus.

Sometimes God does that. We read in the 23rd Psalm that God leads us “beside still waters,” (Psalm 23), but compared with the passage from Mark, we also get led into stormy waters. The question becomes does God intentionally lead us into a storm? I would say no. But I would add that God does intentionally lead us, invites us to follow, and willingly and lovingly leads us knowing that storms can and probably will occur. I much prefer to have an invitation to be lead by God and have a storm then to miss being lead by God without the storms.

Reverend William Willimon points out that we can find another such example of lead into the storm in today’s Epistle lesson. Paul is in a big fight with the Church at Corinth. He has to defend himself from many charges including boasting about himself and of being of sound mind. I’m sure Paul would prefer to be secluded in his study, pouring over scripture and notes, and not have to go out and do all the stuff that goes with starting new churches in difficult places like the sin city of Corinth. But he gets invited to sail with Jesus and that trip takes him into a storm. And while Paul escaped bodily injury at Corinth, his story ends at Rome, where he was executed by the government; executed even though Paul obeyed God and was doing God’s will (Willimon). Sounds like a voracious storm to me.

So in today’s gospel, Jesus sleeps on his cushion in the boat even though the disciples fear for their lives. This is a bit disarming. I mean, after all, what greater purpose does Jesus have than to look after us? When he awakes he asks

two questions, “Why are you afraid” (v. 40), to which the answer is probably they thought they were going to die, and second, “Have you still no faith” (v.40), to which I hear the disciples saying, “Oh yeah, faith.”

We are here to be faithful and worship Jesus, not only in this place, but as Christians throughout our lives. But let’s be honest. We also hope that we receive what we need from Jesus. We are looking for things like comfort, enlightenment, meaning, fulfillment, contentment, peace, a reason to live, smooth sailing and a host of other things that we think we need and deserve. Sometimes we find those things, but not always, at least not immediately (Willimon). However, throughout the search, we often forget the real purpose is to live for Jesus. How often I have heard people say that they don’t get anything from worship. I have never heard anyone say they don’t live enough for Jesus.

So the question becomes, can we more fully live for Jesus and accept him as he is? Mark makes it clear in today’s passage that the disciples “took him with them just as he was” (v.36). That’s the second point I want to make. The answer to the question is that we often want to remake Jesus into who we think we need him to be rather than accepting Jesus just as he is. We attempt to make Jesus into our errand boy. We often want to share all the things we need done and how we need Jesus to help us rather than trying to serve Jesus as he is.

I confess that as a preacher I have the tendency to make Jesus into the One who can make everything right. Are you sad? Jesus will make you happy. Trouble with your children? Jesus will make it right? Feeling lost, lonely, or out of touch?

Tell Jesus all about it and see the difference. It is time that Jesus gets busy for you. That's been a typical message. Instead, the real message needs to be, let's get busy for Jesus.

We are like the disciples and are in the boat with Jesus. We cry out in fear. Jesus wonders about our faith because faith means we are willing to love and obey Jesus even, when with him, we have problems that we might not have had without him. The disciples can be our examples; they are confused by Jesus, but stay in the boat with him and are "filled with great awe" (v.41).

Working with this week's sermon reminded me of what Brian McLaren wrote in, "A Generous Orthodoxy." *I am a Christian because I have confidence in Jesus Christ – in all his dimensions (those I know and those I don't). I trust Jesus. I think Jesus is right because I believe God was in Jesus in an unprecedented way. Through Jesus I have entered into a real, experiential relationship with God as Father, and I have received God's Spirit into my life. I have experienced the love of God through Jesus, and as the old hymn says, "love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all." As I seek to follow Jesus as my leader, guide, and teacher, I believe I am experiencing life in its fullest dimensions – full of joy and love, and yes, full of struggle and challenge, too. For all those reasons and more, I love Jesus. I believe Jesus embraces me, and you, and the whole world in the love of God" (Willimon).*

Today's good news is that Jesus is the Son of God which means among other things power from his presence that can calm the storm, calm the people in

the midst of the storm, and maybe even calm us when we swim with the sharks. Accepting Jesus just as he is, wherever we may be, is living a life of true faith. It is ours for the living. Shall we? Let us pray.

Lord,

You are God of all places. Yet, we only want smooth sailing. We pray for the faith to be calm in the storm realizing the power of your presence. Acknowledging that we are yours rather than you being ours, we pray to you gratefully, thankfully, and accepting of you just as you are. Amen.

Offering: Let us make our morning offering mindful of the ways that this money can help share the good news of Jesus Christ. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: O Lord, accept and bless this offering and use it and us in the hope of greater love and compassion in our time and all time. This we pray, Amen.

Benediction: Go forth in the peace and power of Christ, daring to share, daring to care, and daring to love. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.
Nautical Jokes; www.myboatclub.com; 2009.
Willimon, William; Pulpit Resource; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2008.

