

Sermon June 23, 2024

Children's Time

Mark 4:35-41

Late that day he said to them, "Let's go across to the other side." They took him in the boat as he was. Other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping! They roused him, saying, "Teacher, is it nothing to you that we're going down?"

Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, "Quiet! Settle down!" The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass. Jesus reprimanded the disciples: "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?"

They were in absolute awe, staggered. "Who is this, anyway?" they asked. "Wind and sea at his beck and call!"

Storm Ending by Jean Toomer

Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads,
Great, hollow, bell-like flowers,
Rumbling in the wind,
Stretching clappers to strike our ears . . .
Full-lipped flowers
Bitten by the sun
Bleeding rain
Dripping rain like golden honey—
And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

Stormy Weather

Recently, I heard Nanci Griffith's version of the song "Wasn't That a Mighty Storm." The Mighty Storm hit Galveston, TX in 1900. The winds blew and

the storm raged on Sept. 8, on a day when the city was filled with port workers and vacationers. City leaders heard a storm was coming, but they had no idea how vicious it was.

It's hard to imagine what it would be like to have weather change so suddenly on you. We live in a time of weather reports and satellite imaging. Even though we joke about how wrong the forecasts can be, the fact is we can track storms for days before they reach us. We may not know exactly where it will land, but we certainly know when storms are heading our way. We can plan our days according to the images and think that we have some kind of control over nature's power.

Without this technology, the people of Galveston had no idea that the impending storm was a category 4 hurricane and they thought they could ride it out. Some vacationers even took picnic lunches to the shore, to watch the storm blow in.

But when it blew in, it was worse than their wildest dreams. The storm surge and winds destroyed 8,000 people. The Galveston storm is still the deadliest natural disaster in American history.

No one can control the storms as they blow in.

Sometimes when the uncontrollable storms of life swirl around us, we wonder if we will be swept away like those poor vacationers. Sometimes the storms of life are really storms... Thunder and lightning fill the sky... hurricanes, tornados, floods change the fabric of our lives.

Sometimes the things that batter us are not natural disasters but are destructive nonetheless. Events of our lives break in upon us and blow us off course when we least expect it.

The death of a loved one, an unexpected illness, facing enemies and bullies, financial pressures, violence, substance abuse... all of a sudden our hearts leap in pain and anguish.

These are the times when it feels like no one can control the storms as they blow all around us. And we feel so alone.

And sometimes the hardest part is that these storms often come out of nowhere. No time to plan or adapt. All we can do is try to keep our heads above water.

Today we hear of a storm like that. A storm so bad that experienced fishermen were frightened, terrified.

And the storm came out of nowhere. The day began like any other day. From the moment the sun rose, the crowds began to swell... people looking for an opportunity to see Jesus... to be healed... to hear his words of wisdom. It was very exciting to see how quickly the gospel spread through the countryside, but... The disciples longed to have some time with Jesus. To be alone, to ask questions about what they've seen and heard... to just be with him. Finally, Jesus was ready to go. He suggested that they take a boat across the river to find a quiet place to be alone.

As soon as they were in the boat, they began to relax. The sound of the water lapping against the boat, the calm movement as they slowly drifted across, lulled them all to sleep. It was so peaceful to be there, in that quiet place, alone with Jesus.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, that powerful storm blew in. The boat bounced, the waves bellowed, the boat began to fill with water... and the disciples were jolted awake. In desperation, they looked for Jesus, but he was still fast asleep.

How could he sleep? Stranded in the middle of the lake with the storm winds blowing; if they capsized, they would surely die. And yet, here was Jesus... still fast asleep without a care in the world.

"Jesus, what is wrong with you? We are going to die! Don't you even care?"

Sometimes when the storms of life swirl around us, it is easy to feel like Jesus doesn't even care. We feel all alone.

These are them moments when it feels as if when the waves are threatening to swamp our boat... that God is asleep and is nowhere to be seen, nowhere to be found.

“Where are you Jesus? Don’t you even care?”

When the disciples cry out, they are facing a crisis of faith. No matter what they have seen... no matter what they know about Jesus... in the face of this storm they see only the potential disaster, not the transformative power of God.

And yet, when they cry out, they do exactly what God needs them to do.

The disciples know who to cry out to... Jesus, who’s name means “the One who Saves.” In the midst of their cries and fears, they discover more about Jesus’ love.

Jesus tells us over and over again that it is alright to cry out to God. God invites us to cry. We are told to ask, to seek, to knock, and to pound on the door of heaven. As the waves break in and the storm is blows, the disciples do the one thing that is left to do. They have used their knowledge and skills to try and keep the boat afloat and now they cry in their need to Jesus. And Jesus hears and responds to that cry. Our fears are so strong when the storms of life threaten to overwhelm us, but still we can cry to Jesus and know that he hears and that he will respond to the cry of our hearts. No matter how bitter our words, Jesus always responds.

Jesus gets up. And then he does something even the disciples did not expect. He lifts up his hands and **speaks to the waves and to the wind:**

Peace, be still.

And, just as suddenly as it began, the wind died down. The air was completely still, and there was calm.

During the storms of our lives, the chaos is not from the waves outside; it's the chaos that churns within us, tearing us apart. It's the moment in the dark of night when we wake up in a panic, cold sweat covering our bodies. We cry out to God and when we do, we will find to our surprise that God is not absent. Jesus is not absent. God comes to us and comforts us. Jesus' stands up straight and speaks directly to the storm that is within our turbulent and tossed spirits.

Peace, be still.

Jesus is the One who Saves! With a word, the storm is gone. God's power and compassion at work in Jesus. The disciples had never experienced this kind of loving power in a person. They were learning more about Jesus every day, one like them and yet somehow so much more than they were. One who cared and helped and came to be with them, just as he comes to be with us today. The One who knows our cry, knows what it means to be in a boat swamped by the storm and yet has the power to give peace and strength to each of us. The disciples called out for peace and God met them at their point of need. We may call for peace and God, through Jesus Christ, will meet us at our point of need. May this be true in your life this day and through the days ahead. Amen.

Prayer

Peace. Be Still