**Finding Peace in Storms**

Mark 4:35-41

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Even though I grew up in Watertown, Wisconsin, I have a lot of fear related to water. When I was around 8 years old, I was out on Devil’s Lake (appropriately named, I might add) with my dad and some of his buddies on a homemade pontoon boat. We were night fishing for lake trout. After fishing in one spot for a while, we decided to move to another location so my dad bent down to start the motor and pulled the rope. It started fine but proceeded to fall off the boat and sink to the bottom of the lake. My dad and his buddies thought it was funny but I was afraid. We were in the middle of the lake in pitch darkness and had no oars so we had to use some old kitchen chairs that had been fastened to the floor of the boat to paddle our way to shore. I didn’t think we’d ever make it.

A few years later I was in a small boat on Lake Michigan with my dad fishing for salmon. It was a cold, windy and rainy day. But then it got worse. Let’s just say that I turned various shades of green and ended up expelling the Johnsonville brats, cheese curds and Snicker bars I had consumed for breakfast.

When I was a teenager I was out on Rock Lake with some friends and one of my sisters. I was skiing while my buddy steered the boat. He tried to make me fall by turning the wheel sharply. When he did, I fell and then he fell off the seat and landed on the floor of the boat. The boat made a circle and came directly for me as I bobbed like a buoy in the water. At the last second my sister (I guess I do like my sisters) grabbed the wheel and turned it, moving the boat away from me.

Then, days before I graduated from high school, I was out swimming with some friends in the Rock River right below a power dam when my friend Tim drowned before my eyes.

To this day I’m wary of water and would rather be a bum on the beach than wander into the waves. Our text for today is located on a lake and we’re going to discover that the disciples had some pretty intense aquaphobia as well.

Please turn to Mark 4:35-41. If you’re using the pew Bible, it’s found on page 1068. Justin Rumley, our summer pastoral intern will read our text and then pray for the sermon. Justin grew up at Edgewood and is the son of Mark and Janet and is now a student at Moody Bible Institute. Would you stand in honor of God’s Word and follow along as he reads?

***On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.  He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”***

Let’s climb in the boat with Jesus as He takes us to the other side. Jesus obviously has some plans for His disciples that they know nothing about. They’ve been “learning” a lot and now it’s time to see if they will live what they’ve learned. In this text we’ll discover five truths about God’s plans for modern-day disciples.

**1. His plan may be puzzling.** Check out verse 35 – ***“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’”*** This has been a long day of ministry that starts in Mark 3:20. Jesus has been confronted by the scribes and criticized by his own family. Because of all the crowds, Jesus used a boat to teach some parables and now He wants to go for a boat ride to the other side.

Here are some reasons why Jesus may have wanted to cross the lake.

* **To escape the crowd and get some rest.** The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee was less populated and would be easier to find peace and quiet. Verse 36 says that they were ***“leaving the crowd.”***
* **To teach and train the disciples.**
* **To free a man in bondage** (more about this next week).
* **To reach an unreached culture with the gospel.** We know from Mark 1:38 that Jesus continually moved to other towns and communities as part of his mission. Last week we focused on unreached people groups. We do that because that’s what our Master modeled for us. If you want to grow in your understanding of the unreached and begin praying practical prayers, check out two resources we included in the bulletin. By the way, the gospel seed is germinating in big ways in Africa and China and most recently, in Nepal.

While the Sea of Galilee is mentioned 53 times in the Gospels and is the setting or backdrop for many of the messages and miracles of Jesus, hardly any focus is on *“the other side.”* That’s primarily because that side of the lake was where the Gentiles lived and Jewish people avoided that area at all cost. They didn’t want to hang out with pagan people and it was commonly believed that the devil himself had his dwelling there.

The “other side” was unsettling and uncertain so they’d rather stay away. Likewise, we’re called to follow Jesus’ plan even when it doesn’t make sense. Incidentally, this is not a suggestion but a command of Christ according to Matthew 8:1: ***“…He gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.”***

Just as Jesus called His first followers to go with Him to the other side, so too each of us must go where He goes, even if we’re uncomfortable with people who are different from us. We have an opportunity to do just that on Saturday, June 18 for World Refugee Day at Blackhawk State Park. During the walk for freedom we’ll get a sense of what it’s like for refugees as they walk hundreds of miles without food or water. BTW, if we raise a certain amount of money for this, Pastor Ed will be in the dunk tank!

The disciples don’t hesitate. If that’s where Jesus wants to go then that’s where they’ll go. We see this in verse 36: ***“And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as He was. And other boats were with him.”*** They took Jesus ***“just as He was,”*** meaning they didn’t make any preparations or gather any provisions because He was already in the boat. Luke 8:23 mentions that the conditions are perfect: ***“And as they sailed…”***

**2. His plan often includes problems.** The Sea of Galilee is really a lake but is called a sea because it has a lot of the same characteristics. It is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide and is the lowest fresh water lake in the world. This sea is known for its severe storms as cold wind whips down from snow-capped Mount Hermon and combines with the warm lake air causing explosive thunderstorms and gale-force winds. It was not uncommon for the waves to reach a height of 10-12 feet and sometimes up to 20 feet. One commentator writes: *“The Sea was known to swallow entire ships and gulp down people.”*

It was a common superstition for people to view the water as the abyss, where demons lurked in the deep. This sea was considered the manifestation of the realm of death. Besides that, the lake was thought to be where mysterious sea creatures, known as leviathan, lived. Given these superstitions, it’s no wonder that many lived with some aquaphobia.

Look at verse 37 - ***“And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.”*** The word ***“great”*** is the word “megas” which refers to something being huge. The word for ***“windstorm”*** is used of a tempest or a hurricane. Matthew uses *“seismos”* or seismic to describe it. The imperfect tense is utilized to let us know that the sea *“kept spilling over into the boat.”*  Matthew says the boat was being ***“swamped”*** by waves. Luke 8:23 says, ***“they were in great danger.”***

Don’t miss the point that Jesus sent them into the boat, knowing that a storm was coming. In order to get to the other side they had to go through a storm. Don’t think that just because you’re going through some choppy seas that you’re somehow being punished or that you’re being disobedient. No doubt God does send some storms to get our attention like he did with Jonah in Jonah 1:4: ***“But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.”***  Other times storms come because of our obedience.

My guess is that you’re in one of three places today.

1. You are in a storm right now.
2. You are coming out of a storm.
3. You’re about to head into one.

And when storms come, they are often:

* **Sudden.** They come in a split second, seemingly out of nowhere. All it takes is one phone call, a doctor visit, an accident, a job loss or a relational rupture.
* **Severe.** The disciples think they are going to drown and some of you feel like you’re going under right now. This had to be some storm. We know at least four of the disciples were fishermen and they’re freaking out. John MacArthur points out that *“it’s a dark day when sailors call on a carpenter to get them out of the storm.”*
* **Surprising.** I’m often surprised when a storm hits but I shouldn’t be because 1 Peter 4:12 says: ***“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”***

In his book called, “The Pressure’s Off,” Larry Crabb argues that God is not a vending machine dispensing blessings as rewards for our good behavior. We need to reject a faith that is filled with a formula that says, *“If I do ‘A,’ then God will do ‘B’ for me.”*

His plans may be puzzling and they often include problems but they always come with His presence.

**3. His plan comes with His presence.** Where is Jesus when the storm comes? He’s taking a power nap in the back of the boat! Verse 38 - ***“But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion…”*** We see here a picture of the humanity of Jesus. He’s tired so he’s sleeping and yet He’s in total control. He’s peaceful even though there are problems taking place; He’s sleeping while they’re sweating. He’s on His throne and He’s also in the boat with them. He didn’t keep them from the storm, but He went through it with them.

The disciples are totally undone and so they wake Him up and scream out a question, dripping with condemnation: ***“…Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** This literally reads, *“Do we mean so little to you?”* Matthew 8:25 captures their emotional consternation: ***“Save us Lord; we are perishing!”***

Before we get too hard on them, don’t we often do the same thing when God doesn’t do what we want Him to do? It’s common to attack His character and question His goodness when bad things erupt in our lives. While we’re taking on water and sinking under the waves of worry, God often seems asleep. We see this in Psalm 44:23: ***“Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.”*** Some of us have echoed the agony found in Psalm 10:1: ***“Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”***

Some skeptics have pointed out that there’s a conflict between Matthew, Mark and Luke because they each report this incident slightly differently. For example, Mark has the disciples crying out, ***“Teacher!”*** Matthew uses ***“Lord!”*** and Luke has them saying, ***“Master, Master!”*** This is not a conflict at all. We all do the same when we’re in trouble and cry out every name we can think of: *“Teacher, Lord, Master, Master…please help me!”*

The greatest storm that night was not on the Sea of Galilee but in the souls of the disciples. One commentator put it like this: *“The storm on the sea whipped up a storm of doubt within them that threatened to drown them all.”*

Friend, don’t confuse God’s silence with a lack of compassion because He cares deeply for you. 1 Peter 5:7: ***“Casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.”*** Commentator Matthew Henry says that the ship that has Christ in it, though it may be tossed, cannot sink. Here’s something that may be helpful. Whenever you’re sinking under a sea of stress and anxiety, remember this phrase: *Don’t despair, Christ is there!*

It is only in the storm that we understand who Jesus really is. We learn most about Christ when we are in crisis. Storms weren’t sent to destroy you, but to develop you.

Since Jesus is who He says is, then we have nothing to fear. His plans for us may be puzzling and they often include problems but they come with His presence and a demonstration of His power.

**4. His plan demonstrates His power.** I love how Jesus slept through the storm but as soon as his children cried out He woke up. It’s interesting how moms can sleep soundly but when they hear just a whimper from their newborn they pop out of bed. That’s how Beth was with each of our daughters. Verse 39 - ***“And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”***

It’s interesting that Jesus does not specifically answer their question about whether He cared because the answer they needed was to see a demonstration of His power. All Jesus had to do was utter a command and that which He created instantly obeyed.

What a picture! When he stood up all the forces of nature took notice. What He creates, He controls. When he rebuked the howling wind and the roaring waves they bowed before Him. The phrase Jesus uses means to *“be muzzled and remain so.”* He said the same thing in Mark 1:25 when He told the demon to be quiet. Mark is showing us Jesus’ power over diseases, the demons and the deep. Psalm 89:9: ***“You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.”***  Psalm 107:29: ***“He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”***

With a word, Jesus muzzled a major windstorm and stopped millions of gallons of water from moving…instantly! There are really two miracles here. First, He stopped the wind. Second, He stilled the water. Normally if the wind dies down, the waves would keep rolling along but the wind ceased howling and the waves stopped moving immediately. The winds and the waves were synchronized into solemn silence. The sea was as still as the offense of the Chicago Bears! I like what someone said about this passage: *“No water can swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and skies.”*

After preaching in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Pastor Fred Luter of New Orleans concluded his sermon with these words: *“Always remember that when the storms show up, so does the Savior.”*

**5. His plan always has a purpose.** The greatest storm that night was not on the Sea of Galilee but in the souls of the disciples. There are some things they were not going to get unless they went through some storms. I love that while the disciples accused and attacked Jesus, He responds gently and tenderly to them. This is where truth turns to trust and where learning is translated into living. Jesus gives three purposes behind the plans God has for us.

* **To deal with our fear.** After rebuking the storm, Jesus reproves the disciples by asking some questions in verse 40. Here’s the first: ***“Why are you so afraid?”*** That word means *“timid, to the point of giving up.”* He had already promised they were going to the other side. They had seen His power in other settings and He was present with them. What more did they need? Jesus asks you and me the same question: *Why are you so afraid?*
* **To grow our faith.** And here’s His second question: ***“Have you still no faith?”*** This can be translated, *“Do you not yet have faith?”*Fear can fillet our faith; and faith can force out our fears. The biggest issue is not that Jesus stopped the storm but that He couldn’t find their faith. It’s ironic that it’s only the wind and the waves that are obeying Him in this passage.

Before moving on, as the Master Teacher, don’t miss that Jesus loved to ask questions. I listened to a Breakpoint Commentary this week in which John Stonestreet urges us to utilize questions when interacting with people about cultural issues. Here are some he suggested: *What do you mean by that? How do you know that is true? Where did you get this information? How did you come to this conclusion? What if you’re wrong?*

* **To increase our awe.** One pastor has said that the only thing worse than having a storm outside your boat is to have the Lord Almighty inside your boat. After Jesus asks them two questions, the disciples are very unsettled and in turn ask a question in verse 41 - ***“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the seas obey Him?’”*** Luke adds that they were afraid and ***“they marveled.”***

You’ve heard of the calm before the storm, right? This is the storm *after* the calm. The sea is at rest but the disciples are all churned up. You would think they would chill when the waves were still. The storm made them afraid but the power of Christ made them petrified. The word ***“fear”*** literally means, *“They feared a great fear; to be stricken with awe and amazement in the presence of one greater than self.”* They had a combination of fear and reverence. With deity on full display, they are twice as terrified after the storm. If Jesus did that to the forces of nature, what would He do to them?

The Greek word *“megas”* is used to describe the ***“great windstorm”*** in verse 37 and is used again to describe the ***“great calm”*** in verse 39. And verse 41 says they were filled with ***“great fear”*** and this is after the great windstorm was replaced with great calm!

I wonder if Psalm 93:4 was going through their minds: ***“Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty!”***

 In short, they didn’t have a category for Christ. One translation says, *“What manner of man is this?”* He was more frightening than what they had just experienced in the storm. They realize they are in the presence of holiness and came unglued like Isaiah did in Isaiah 6:5: ***“Woe to me! I am ruined!”***

R.C. Sproul says that it was His awesome otherness that made them uncomfortable. That’s exactly what Peter said on another occasion when Jesus filled their nets with so many fish that the boat began to sink: ***“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ feet and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”*** (Luke 5:8). The woman who was healed by touching Jesus’ garment had a similar response in Mark 5:33: ***“But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.”*** Here’s the deal. Unholy sinners are not comfortable in the presence of the holy Savior.

Andrew Robinson, the worship pastor at Wildwood Church in East Moline, sang at the last Second Winders event. He said something I had not thought of before. The Apostle John, who enjoyed a very close relationship with Jesus, was later exiled to the island of Patmos. The resurrected and Jesus appeared to him and we read about his response in Revelation 1:17: ***“When I saw Him, I fell at his feet as though dead…”***

I wonder if we’ve overemphasized Jesus being our friend at the expense of losing our fear of Him? A reverential awe of God will keep us from being afraid during adversity.

Jesus reveals His plan through this perfect storm.

**1. His plan may be puzzling.**

**2. His plan often includes problems.**

**3. His plan comes with His presence.**

**4. His plan demonstrates His power.**

**5. His plan always has a purpose.**

As I reflected on this passage I realized that we’re all in the same boat…pun intended. J. Vernon McGee once said: *“What a wonderful lesson we learn here. He puts us into the storms of life in order that we might grow closer to Him and that we might know Him better.”*

**Life Lessons**

Let’s lift out some life lessons from this passage.

**1. Christ cares for you and can help in your crisis.** The disciples accused Christ of not caring. Let’s not make that same mistake. This incident reveals both the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus. He fell asleep in the stern of the boat; that’s His humanity. He spoke and the storm and the sea were completely calm; that’s His deity. He understands what we’re going through because He is fully man and He can do something about it because He’s fully God. Hebrews 4:15-16: ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** Isaiah 43:2: ***“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.”***

**2. Christ is in complete control of everything.** We don’t know what’s coming but Jesus does. He’s great and He’s good and He is wise. What do you need to trust Him with right now? Chuck Swindoll writes, *“Anything under God’s control is never out of control.”* Can you trust Jesus in the most threatening of circumstances? Every crisis we go through is really an opportunity to get to know Him better. His sleeping days are over. Psalm 121:3-4: ***“He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”***

I came across a quote from Francis Chan a week ago that is quite powerful: *“Can you worship a God who isn’t obligated to explain His actions to you? Could it be your arrogance that makes you think God owes you an explanation?”*

**3. We all must go through storms to get to the other side.** It’s easy to faithfully worship in fair weather but a lot harder when the hurricanes of life hit. We’re not promised an easy trip but we are guaranteed arrival at our destination. Remember this - the only way to the other side is through the storms. Settle this right now so you’re not surprised when the storms come.

In early Christian art, the church is often depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea. Jesus told the disciples to go to other side in verse 35 and in 5:1 we read, ***“They came to the other side.”***

**4. If you’re going through a storm you better have Jesus in your boat.** Go back and look at verse 36: ***“And other boats were with Him.”*** But only one of them had Jesus in it. Is He in your boat? Is the Lord in your life? Since Jesus can still the winds and the waves He can clobber your addictions, put your marriage back together and lead you into the future! Jesus said, “Let us go over.” He didn’t say, “Let us go under.”

It was about a year after my friend Tim drowned that I was saved. God used that storm to bring me to salvation. How about you?

**5. Make sure that Jesus is steering your ship.** Are you allowing Jesus to be commander of your boat? It’s very interesting to read in verse 38 that Jesus was ***“asleep on the cushion.”*** The use of the definite article ***“the”*** shows us that it was a specific cushion. This cushion was reserved for the captain of the ship. Jesus is in the spot of the steersman. Is He steering your life? Have you given Him control…of everything?

If you have not been saved and you’re not allowing Jesus to steer your life, you are headed into a huge storm on the Day of Judgment.

**6. Grow in your awe of Christ.** Settle the fact that life is not about you. Later on, in Matthew 14, the disciples are on the water again and the boat was getting ***“beaten by the waves.”*** Jesus comes to them on the water and they become terrified. Peter then walks on the water. I want you to see what happens next in verse 32: ***“And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.”*** I’m sure this reminded them of what happened during the storm several months earlier. Only this time they don’t wonder what kind of man Jesus is. Now they get it. Listen to verse 33: ***“And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”***

**7. Jesus won’t always calm the storm but He will calm you.** The Apostle Paul went through a terrible storm in Acts 27 that the Lord did not calm. Listen. Paul had great faith and he had a shipwreck; the disciples had little faith and the Lord stilled the sea. It all has to do with His sovereign will.

He may not still the storm that you’re in right now but He can still you. He may not always change your circumstances but if you surrender to Him, He will change you in your circumstances.

Warren Wiersbe puts it like this: *“The greatest danger was not the wind or the waves, it was the unbelief in their hearts. Our greatest problems are within us, not around us.”*

If you want to settle a spiritual storm in your heart, I invite you to come up front as Pastor Chad sings our closing song called, “Sometimes He Calms the Storm.”

*Sometimes He calms the storm*

*With a whispered peace be still*

*He can settle any sea*

*But it doesn’t mean He will*

*Sometimes He holds us close*

*And lets the wind and waves go wild*

*Sometimes He calms the storm*

*And other times He calms His child*

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