

Faith and Calm in the Storm

Mark 4:35-41

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*35 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?"*

Mark 4:35-41

Why are you afraid? Jesus asks the drenched and trembling disciples. *Have you still no faith?*

If we had faith we could move mountains. If we had faith we could calm storms. If we had faith we wouldn't feel afraid when we are faced with the very real possibility of perishing, or grieve when someone we love dies. We wouldn't worry so much, we wouldn't doubt so much, we'd feel sure, happy, confident. If we had faith we wouldn't have questions, or feelings that were not positive. We'd never feel overwhelmed or angry. If we had faith.

And I wonder, when I hear this story, What is it about us, that when we hear this story, when we see the storm and witness the disciples' terror, and then watch Jesus speak to nature, addressing the elements themselves, and observe that in an instant and the wind and the waves obey him – why, when we hear this miraculous tale of terror, dramatic salvation and amazement, do we focus on the question, *Why are you still afraid, Don't you have any faith?*

Like Jesus looks out from the pages past the disciples, right at us and asks, *What's wrong with you? Where's your faith?*

Maybe we have we've missed the point a little.

When you hear that word, what do you think of – faith? Beliefs? Trust?

I wonder if Jesus is expecting me to ignore the storms around me or within me, or say that a raging gale is just a light summer rain – that losing a job or a friend, or getting a serious diagnosis shouldn't rattle me, or that tension between friends or regretful words are nothing to fret about, then I can honestly say *I can't do it.*

It's impossible. I am a rattleable person. Sometimes I am strong, but a lot of the time I worry and sometimes I fear. I have a lot of questions. And if I have my whole life to perfect this

thing and strive every moment of every day, I will never reach the level of faith that keeps me calm in a storm. So where is my faith?

I think there's another line in this story that shows faith. It's actually the disciple's awe and fear-filled response. *Even the wind and the seas obey him! Who then is this?*

Who then is this? Who is this God? The story asks.

And by asking, it invites us to notice:

Jesus is the one who gets in the boat with them to lead them to the other side.

Jesus is the one who calms the storm.

Jesus hears their cries.

Jesus looks on them with compassion.

Jesus wishes they were not afraid.

Jesus wishes they had more faith.

Jesus can see what's bigger than the storm and invites them to see that too.

This story isn't to tell us to buck up and have faith so we don't fear.

It's a reminder that even when we fear, God is there, the Holy One is with us.

That whether what we fear comes to pass or not, we are not alone.

That we can have an emotional outburst at God and it doesn't chase God away.

And faith is that point- whether before it all happens or after it's all over, or ,God-willing, right *Who then is this Christ? Source of love*

When we are in the midst of a storm – all kinds of storms – Covid-19, beloved who is sick, facing serious health issues, conflict, or storms in society – gun violence, climate crisis, polarizing politics, it can overwhelm us. Make us feel afraid, worried.

Why are you afraid?

Because this storm is going to kill me.

Because my arms and back are tired, and the wind is cold, and it's loud and terrifying.

Because you are asleep. You don't seem to notice the peril I am in and it makes me feel alone.

And then comes the reminder, *I am here. I will take care of you. Don't you trust me?* And with the question, *Who is this Jesus?* comes the faith.

Our storms are not always something that happens to us. Sometimes they happen within us – longing to trust God to act, frustrated about the pain in the world and people who do not fear God seeming to get away with evil on God's watch.

Sometimes our storms are wrestling to come to terms with what we're experiencing, or an addiction we can't shake that threatens to overwhelm us, or feelings of helplessness at what we see around us.

When Faith asks, *Who then is this God?* It gives us perspective. We see, in many Psalms, God cares for the poor
God made some promises
God sees all people as valuable
God hasn't given up
God is a stronghold for oppressed and a helper in need,

And then the prayer becomes, *Look God! I **know** you care. I know you can make things right. And I hate what's happening to me. And to people who seem not to be seen at all. You see us. God, please help now!"*

And sometimes storms happen between us. They breed mistrust and jealousy; they allow us to stop seeing one another as human beings and instead as adversaries or threats.

But sometimes we have faith in the middle of a situation, and we can ask about God, *Who then is this? Who are you, God, in the midst of this?*

When we remember that God does real things in our life, even right now, and that God made all of us in God's image, God wants us to be connected, in relationship, God loves me and loves them too
God brings wholeness and healing,
And then, perhaps we don't need to run or give up in fear, but can hang in there and seek to be reconciled, can be vulnerable even in pain, and can reach out and seek to make things right, even if there is no guarantee that it will succeed.

Life is scary. Relationships are messy. Being a person in the world is a scary, messy business. And instead of leaving us to sort it all out on our own, Jesus joins the mess, and stands right next to our fear, so that in the storms around, between and within us, and in the times of calm and peace, when we feel strong and sure and full of confidence, or weak and scared and utterly confused, when life is ordinary and boring or extraordinarily meaningful, in all our moments, whether we know it just then or not, Holy One is present, and we are invited to trust, and to both delve into the answer and be drawn into the question, again and again, ***Who then is this God?***

How do I answer that question as a person of faith? If I say I am a person of faith, what does that mean?

Perhaps faith isn't having an answer or even simply a matter of trust; maybe faith is being willing to ask a question, even being willing to call *into* question something you once believed.

Faith, I think, is being open to an unknown future. But it's precisely the fact that it's *unknown* that elicits our faithful, and sometimes fearful, questions. So maybe faith isn't simply belief, maybe faith is even more than trust. Maybe faith is a question: voicing a question, calling what we thought we knew into question, living with the questions we have, not unafraid, but undaunted, willing to ask those questions, even to embrace them – and all of life – as a mystery not to be solved but to be experienced.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote the following in a letter to a young poet:
Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

So also, faith – the challenge isn't simply to hold a settled belief, or even to trust without thinking, but to question, to ask, to struggle...and then to listen, receive, and *live*, not so much seeking an answer but rather drawn into the embrace of the One who planted the question into our hearts in the first place. And perhaps, simply from a willingness to love the questions, we may live into the answers as come to trust the love of this mysterious God.

Author Sue Monk Kidd has written eloquently about the disruption spiritual seekers often encounter in midlife and our resistance to it. She wonders:

What has happened to our ability to dwell in unknowing, to live inside a question and coexist with the tensions of uncertainty? Where is our willingness to incubate pain and let it birth something new? What has happened to patient unfolding, to endurance? These things are what form the ground of waiting. And if you look carefully, you'll see that they're also the seedbed of creativity and growth—what allows us to do the daring and to break through to newness. . . .

Creativity flourishes not in certainty but in questions. Growth germinates not in tent dwelling but in upheaval. Yet the seduction is always security rather than venturing, instant knowing rather than deliberate waiting. (*When the Heart Waits* pg. 25)

How might you live into questions this week and rest in eternal love through storms? Amen.

(parts of this sermon were inspired by "What is Faith?" Rev. Kara Root, 6/23/12)

<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2012/06/what-is-faith.html>