

**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**



SERMON

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# When Storms Hit Home

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### Mark 4:35–41

#### Jesus Stills a Storm

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

Summer has arrived. For many of us we will head to the waters of the beach, the swimming pool or wave pool, maybe even a sprinkler in the backyard with delight. Some will enjoy the serenity of a quiet walk on the shore or a cruise to a tropical island. Modern images of the sea are typically tame and inviting, lulling us into associating the sea with a sense of tranquility. The sea can be described in an endless number of ways: refreshing, sparkling, and fun filled. Not so for Mark’s gospel!

Mark’s sea is not a place for romantic cruises on crystal blue waters. According to theologian Sharyn Dowd, “the waters are

demon-filled and threaten to leave widows behind whenever their loved ones set sail in pursuit of their livelihood. Mark's sea is where discipleship is challenged, where boundaries are impassable, where life hangs in the balance, and where evil lurks as a formidable foe."

Storms happen – even to the best, the smartest, and the most prepared. That is how it was for the disciples. At the end of a long day of teaching, Jesus needs a break and initiates a trip across the Sea of Galilee. Although the water is usually calm, the wind coming over the surrounding mountains can suddenly raise an intense storm. Even with Jesus on board, they still encountered tremendous gusts. There was no avoiding this storm. Even as they faithfully followed Jesus' instructions to cross the water to the other side, they were beaten by waves. Surrounded by other boats – the wind howled – lightning flashed – rain poured – thunder boomed, and the boat seemed to be sinking. The disciples were terrified that they would perish, and Jesus was asleep – on a cushion no less! So, they cry out, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

We may have never crossed the Sea of Galilee, but we've been in that boat. This story is not just a story about a boat trip and stormy weather. It's a story about life – our life – our fear – our faith. Times of intense trouble, or danger are compared to stormy seas. They come upon us whether we like it or not. Life is like that. We can avoid some storms by watching the weather forecast and using some common sense. We can

avoid some emotional, spiritual, financial, and social disasters by being wise and following God's instructions. But then: the cancer diagnosis comes, the wayward child turns away, the addiction rears up again in the family. Bad things just happen – even while we're minding our own business, doing what's right, living to the best of our ability, with God's help.

Sometimes, life places us in a boat and the storms begin to rage – the storms of pain and loss – the storms of rejection and failure – the storms of illness and death – storms brought on by racial and political unrest, violence. Whenever they arise, storms are about life becoming overwhelming and out of control. The waves crash, the boat fills up, and we're struggling to stay afloat.

For more than a year, the storm of pandemic has taken us to uncharted waters. How many times have you heard the phrase, "Can't we just get back to normal"? After 1,009,000 deaths we have a desired destination but are not sure of when we will get there. The water is deep, and the shore is a distant horizon. We wish we could spout a proclamation from the Bible: Amen and move on with our lives. Instead, we cry out in fear, "God, where are you? Do you not care that we are suffering?"

When the wind ceased and the waves became calm, Jesus questioned the disciples' fear and lack of faith. It is worth noting that Jesus never said, "There's nothing to be afraid of." The storm on the Sea of Galilee that night must have been

extremely terrifying if seasoned fishermen doubted their own ability to keep the boat afloat. We often confuse the two phrases, but saying, “There’s nothing to be afraid of,” is quite different from saying, “Do not be afraid.” The truth is that things that cause fear are very real. Isolation, pain, viruses, the loss of one’s job, or loss of a relationship, illness, and death are real.

Like the disciples in our text, we are also challenged to rediscover our faith when we find ourselves amid storms. J. Herbert Nelson is the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church. When he was a young boy living in south, he remembers the tremendous summer thunderstorms. His grandmother would take him in the living room and have him sit in the chair to listen to the rolling thunder with the lightening. He was afraid, but she would say to him, the Lord is in the storm. The Lord is more powerful than even this storm. He learned to trust the power, majesty of Jesus in his life, especially in the storms.

As we grow in faith, we come to understand that the things that cause us despair do not have the last word. Faith does not eliminate, change, or take us around the storms of our lives. Rather, faith takes us through the storms, reminding us that Jesus is there with us.

We are reminded that the power of God is mightier than any wind that beats against us – that the love of God is deeper than any wave that threatens to drown us. Jesus invites us to

stay with him in the boat saying, “Let us go across to the other side, I won’t leave your side, I’ll journey with you.”

Summer brings on hurricane season too. We are not affected by this too much, but we remember Hurricane Katrina and the destruction to New Orleans. After the last winds died down from Hurricane Katrina, there was little optimism among those who remained in New Orleans and could venture out to see what had happened to their city. But in the heart of the French Quarter, in the courtyard behind St. Louis Cathedral, they found a sign of hope: A statue of Jesus, standing with outstretched arms on a white marble pedestal, still stood amid the rubble, unscathed by the destruction all around. A giant magnolia tree had fallen a few feet away; so had an ancient oak. Several burial vaults lay broken and smashed. But there stood the risen Christ with outstretched arms, offering peace and calm.

Friends, when the storms of life toss us to and fro, may we be reminded that the Master of the winds and the waves is present in every storm and his response is always the same: “Peace! Be still!” Amen.



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