

*This message was delivered to the people of prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church by Ruling Elder Diane Adams. It is based on Mark 4:35-41 and Diane's life experiences. The title: "Faith and Trust"*

Mark 4.35-41

*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?"*

As a teenager who grew up on Lake Erie, and as an adult who lived within three miles of the Atlantic Ocean, I watched calm water develop quickly into heaving waves, dangerous storms and what appeared to be violent maelstroms. There was always a sense of fear for those on the water as they navigated back to shore or as they were rescued by the Coast Guard. Those on land were concerned about flooding and what the rushing of water over the beach, the shoreline, and the cement break walls meant. Prayers were offered for safety. In uncertainty, I was often left with the unspoken question of "Where is God in this?"

Fear is powerful. Whether it is a fear of the unknown, fear of pain, fear of health issues, of conflict in the church, of estrangement from loved ones, loss of income, etc. We know from the time we are children who might be afraid of a thunderstorm, through adulthood that fears will arise. The important thing to remember is that fear can either paralyze us or motivate us. Which way we choose to handle fear will shape our worldview and our lives.

Prior to today's lectionary reading, Jesus had been teaching through parables as in the parable of the growing seed and the parable of the mustard seed. The verse just before today's passage reads, "...he (Jesus) did not speak to them except through parables but he explained everything in private to the disciples."

Jesus in Mark 4.35-41 had finished a long, tiring day of teaching about the Kingdom of God. When the evening came, Jesus invited the disciples to "go across to the other side" of the Sea of Galilee with him. As fishermen the disciples knew that the Sea of Galilee was known for violent windstorms. They would have witnessed these storms. This evening the sea was calm. Then the water changed quickly and as Mark tells us, the boat with low sides was quickly swamped by waves.

As Jesus slept soundly in the stern of the boat, the disciples were confronted by their fears; the kind of fears that surface when they knew they could not control the result of this chaotic, powerful storm. They did not know if they would perish or not.

When they woke Jesus with the question, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus provided an answer that they did not expect. He did not comfort them by saying everything will be alright. Instead he turned to the wind and *rebuked* it and then said to the storm, "Peace! Be still!" Who does that? God, the creator does that!

Jesus asked his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The disciples had witness Jesus repeatedly in action before this evening and he still must pose this question. "Have you still no faith?" When the fear of perishing subsided and the storm was calmed, that is when the disciples were awe struck. Verse 41, "And they were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"

We may never be faced with the possibility of perishing during a tremendous storm at sea, but we do live in the storms of our daily lives. Like the disciples we are defended and upheld by our Lord who rebukes the wind and says to the waves of life, "Peace! Be still!"

If we take this story literally as we did with the children this morning, it describes a wonderful miracle. If we read it in a symbolic sense we see additional value.

Teachable moments typically require questions, answers and wrestling with what challenges our understanding so we can learn, find meaning and accept what Jesus has to offer us. Let us consider some questions. Do you ever feel like the disciples? Why doesn't God do something about your situation? Are you going to let me perish, Lord? Do you care about me? Where is God in this?

Jesus is in the boat of our circumstances with us. Like the disciples, are we still coming to the realization of who Jesus is?

I am a cradle Presbyterian who was taken to Sunday school and church as a child through my teen years. Into my 20's and 30's the sparsity of my attendance began to form. I remember a time in the 1980's when my life was crumbling before my eyes. I chose to divorce my husband; made every excuse possible to avoid Sunday worship; found a willing group of kind, nice secular friends with similar excuses to mine.

Eventually I became extremely tired of myself, my excuses, my choices, and avoidance of looking at myself. Jesus, don't you care that I am perishing? I discovered that I was the one who did not care. Fear did not paralyze me, it motivated me.

One day I found myself on my knees before the Lord. I sobbed and prayed to be changed, recreated and used. When I finally had the strength to stand up, I knew my life had begun to change forever. I did not know how it would be changed; I just knew that I had to follow. It felt like out of the storm and into the calm I came that day. It felt like a very fine piece of thread was attached to my head and periodically I felt a gentle pull. My priorities changed, my worldview changed, even the way I looked began to change. It certainly did not become an easier life. Within a couple of years I was ordained as a deacon, trained as a Stephan Minister, and was eventually ordained as a ruling elder. This imperfect woman even found her way to seminary and jumped through all the PCUSA hoops.

Jesus does not take us aside to explain everything to us as he did at times with the disciples. Instead he explains things to us as we are able to understand. For example, think of the scripture verse you have heard repeatedly year after year that finally holds meaning for you and becomes life changing. This work and understanding does not occur overnight. Rather it is a slow process until we are molded into God's plan and purpose for us.

We can be used by God after we work diligently as God shows us the hidden and deep, deep areas of our individual characters that need direction and healing. We must look inwardly with faith, trust and courage. With time, God's direction becomes more and more clear. It is about life-long learning. I am still being healed and recreated and remain open to God's lead. Are you?

After graduation from seminary in 1998, my sense of call changed from ministry in the church to adoption. It seemed that the way had been cleared and I followed. Over a period of 12 years, I adopted at 13-year old boy, then an 8-year old girl, and finally a 17-year old boy, all from Louisville, KY. Colleagues and friends from church thought that I was crazy and tried to change my mind. For my children and me, it was God directed. The word of the Lord makes things happen.

Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his work *The Cost of Discipleship* said, "To go one's way under the sign of the cross is *not* misery and desperation, but peace and refreshment for the soul, it is the highest joy. Then we do not walk under our self-made laws and burdens, but under the yoke of him who knows us and who walks with us. Under his yoke we are certain of his nearness and communion."

When the disciples realized the presence of Jesus in the boat with them, the storm ceased and there was calm. Once they knew he was there and cared, a fearless peace entered their hearts. To voyage with Jesus is to voyage in peace even in the midst of a wild storm. It happened then and it still happens now for each of us.

The Gospel of Mark instills a sense of urgency that the time to follow Jesus is now. Share your faith and your story for one never knows whose eternity might be changed as a result.

Finally, Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. My life does not work without Jesus in it.