

“Be Calm” – Yeah, Right

Pr 7 - 2nd Sunday After Pentecost

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Mark 4:35-41

Rev. Ellen C. Jennrich

Lutheran Church of the Master, Los Angeles

The disciples begin a journey across the Sea of Galilee. All seems peaceful as they sail across. But all of a sudden a wind comes up, a storm is upon them and the boat is tossed about in the waves and is filling with water. I've never been on the Sea of Galilee where winds come up so quickly out of a calm sea. I've never been in a hurricane either, but I've seen lots of photos of the devastation in their path, and TV news showing the gale-force winds and floods. But even in that chaos of winds of 70 to 150 mph and torrential rain and black clouds, there is a place where there is calm. Dead calm. It is called the “eye” of the hurricane. The hurricane is constantly moving, like a top spinning on a table – but at the very center, there is calm. If you look straight up you can see blue sky. Birds can fly there. God's peace is like that.

There is chaos on the Sea of Galilee. But Jesus is sleeping. “What's happening? Can't you see we're going to die? Wake up, Jesus. Don't you care?”

Have you ever said or thought or prayed those words? Maybe this morning, even. Surely yesterday or the day before or some time in the near past.

“Don't you care that I'm in pain every day?”

“Don't you care that my marriage is breaking up?”

“Don't you care that I just got a pink slip and have no job with no prospects of getting another one soon?”

“Don't you care that my Social Security check doesn't cover my expenses?”

“Don't you care that my retirement nest egg is only half what it used to be?”

“Don't you care that my husband or wife or mother or father or child or grandchild is in the hospital?”

“Don't you care that my children won't come to church?”

“Don't you care that my son has been called into Afghanistan?”

“Don't you care that I have cancer? Or MS? Or heart trouble?”

“Don't you care, Jesus?”

Sometimes, like those men in the boat, we want to shake Jesus and scream, “Don't you CARE about me at all?” We're afraid because the storms of life come up so fast, without warning, and they can be violent and devastating.

And Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid?” Why NOT? When everything around and within us is chaos, those nice words of the Bible sometimes seem so irrelevant. Instead we hang onto our fears, we have pity parties, we whine and complain.

So Jesus says, “Peace! Be still!” Peace during the storm. Calm within the storm. That's what we experience if we put ourselves in the disciples' boat. An inner calm that defies all the wild turmoil going on all around.

In our gospel story, Jesus is at peace – he even sleeps with the waves and water crashing all around. In the core of his being, Jesus has perfect confidence and trust in God’s care, and he passes on that trust to his disciples. He actually stops the raging storm with just a word – “Peace, be still”. Can that peace be ours even in the storms of life? He says, “I am with you always”. He says, “I know” and “I care” and “I can overcome.” In St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Paul summarizes it in a sentence, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”. (Phil. 4:6-7)

At Grace Lutheran in Culver City where I’m a member, the women’s study group recently finished a book called *Calm My Anxious Heart* by Linda Dillow.¹ I think “anxious hearts” aren’t limited to women! During part of the study we thought about 3 reasons we get those “anxious hearts” that give us sleepless nights and high blood pressure and depression. The “what ifs”, the “if onlys” and the “whys” that plague our minds. Worries about the future and the past and the present. What if my son doesn’t graduate? What if I lose my job? What if I have to go to an assisted living facility? If only I hadn’t gone to the market that afternoon. If only I hadn’t gotten so angry. If only we had invested our money in a CD instead of the stock market. Why did I have to get cancer? Why did he get a promotion instead of me when I’m much more qualified? Why can’t I get organized?

Those men in the boat on the Sea of Galilee became frightened – really “deathly afraid” – paralyzed by the “What ifs” and “If onlys” and “Whys” of their situation. They forgot that Jesus was with them. It was only when they called on his powerful name that the storm stopped. We do the same thing, don’t we? A phone call or a split-second accident can change our lives. And we stay frightened. We ignore the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We hang onto our fears and refuse to turn them over to the one who promises to help us bear our burdens. And Jesus asks those two questions: “Why are you afraid?” and “Have you still no faith?” One right after the other. Fear and faith. The two opposites. Faith defeats fear every time. Because faith is trust. Trust that God knows about and can indeed handle any circumstance in our lives. Trust that God DOES care and love us unconditionally – without any strings attached. As we read in First Peter, “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7). The Greek word translated as “cast” means “to throw”. So throw your problems at Jesus! It’s OK – he CARES for you!

This morning we are all together in the same boat. Actually we are physically in the “nave” of the church (from the Latin “navis” or “ship”, where the word “navy” comes from!) – built like an upside-down boat. And we are here with Jesus. You and I can trust that Christ is with us in the challenges that we are facing today. We can trust the promise he makes that he gives inner peace.

¹ Dillow, Linda, *Calm My Anxious Heart*, [NavPress: Colorado Springs], 2007.

“Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” This is Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus who sleeps in your boat and in my boat is not a wimpy escapist who disappears when the going gets tough. This is Jesus, the Christ, the creator of the universe, the One who has authority even over wind and waves, who endured the cross, who rose from the dead, who lives forever and who lives in and with you and me. This is Jesus who shares our burdens and who freely gives the peace that passes all understanding. You and I can cling to that peace, we can move forward as though in the eye of the hurricane, confident of God’s loving care, trusting in the One who calms even a raging storm.

Yes – “calm in the storm” IS possible!! Right!

Let’s pray