

Job 38:1-11 ~ Mark 4:35-41

In the Face of the Storm

July 31, 2022 ~ 8th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Ordination/Installation of Officers ~ VBS Kick-Off

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Introduction

Which is scarier? A: "Crossing over to the other side" where people don't think like you or talk like you and trying to have a conversation with them, while navigating the storms of controversy and conspiracies that are raging? Or B: Facing the storms within: the monsters, the demons lurking in our minds and hearts. You know, the land of deep darkness, where we meet the "Demogorgon" and the "Mind Flayer." (Yes, I've been watching too many episodes of the Netflix show *Stranger Things* under the influence of COVID). Whether you are a fan of *Stranger Things* or not, we all know about the demons of self-doubt and panic. The disorienting swirl where everything familiar and dear seems upside down. We know the overwhelming panic that sets in when the institutions in our lives like a marriage, the church, our body politic, or even our planet's ability to support and sustain us, shift and shake beneath our feet. Something we trusted threatens to crumble and disintegrate or destroy us. So...*Which is scarier A or B?* Perhaps: C. All of the above, would be our best answer.

"Why are you afraid?" (Mark 4:40) That's the question Jesus asks his disciples at the center of our gospel lesson I am about to read. It is one of the Bible stories the children will be learning at Vacation Bible Camp this week. We pick up the story at verse 35 of chapter 4, right after Jesus has spent the whole day teaching a large crowd about the kingdom of God from a boat in the sea near the shore. At this point, they set sail to "cross to the other side." This is the first in a series of miracle stories in Mark's gospel that would demonstrate Jesus' extraordinary powers. This ordinary looking human being would subdue the raging seas, cast out demons, heal a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, and raise a girl who had just died. Wow! Definitely, the one you want in the boat with you when scary things happen. Whatever kind of scary *you* may be facing right now, on this very last day, the edge of July, I invite you to listen for the voice of Jesus, above all others. And to ask yourself, "Is this the voice I am trusting?" Let us listen now for the Word of God within the words of scripture, as I read Mark 4:35-41.

Sermon

Early one evening my husband Bob and I, decided that this would be our last chance that summer to canoe out to Painted Rocks on Flathead Lake in Montana with our two daughters. This was many summers ago: back when Emily was almost 6 and Hannah had just turned 2. As we set out, Bob paddling in the stern and me in the bow, with the two girls in the middle nestled between us, our hearts were filled with the joys of summer on what seemed like a perfect evening. The lake was so calm, you could see the clouds perfectly reflected on the water as if it were a mirror. Yes, those clouds seemed harmless until they weren't.

About twenty minutes into this little jaunt, the clouds darkened, the wind picked up, and before we knew it, Flathead Lake was white capping. As vigorously as we tried to paddle (we were in our mid-30's at the time), we could not make any headway against the wind or the waves. And even though we were not more than thirty feet from the shoreline, but we knew we

were in trouble. So much so, that our hearts leaped with joy and relief when we saw a man and a woman coming toward us in their power boat, offering assistance. We gladly handed our two young children to them into their boat, sure these people could get them to shore safely; so we could deal with just the canoe and the two of us. We were in such a panic, it actually wasn't until we managed to get the canoe to shore, and we were standing on solid ground again, that we realized we'd entrusted our two precious young daughters to complete strangers, who at this point had taken them to safety, but somewhere unknown and out of sight to us.

To this day, now 29 years later, I can still remember the feeling of panic like it was yesterday. How we went from being so relaxed, almost euphoric, directly and swiftly to full panic, fear, and utter helplessness. We were in the face of the storm. Literally. I'm sure all of us have storm stories: (if you had kids on board, you likely were more responsible with your children than we were). Of course, the truth is: Life storms of the metaphoric variety *do not* blow over so quickly, and rarely do they resolve in the way that we wish and hope they would.

When you panic, to whom or to what do you turn? If we take a closer look at our Bible story, we can learn some deep truth that will help us in the face of any storm. First and foremost: Jesus was with them, even though they *felt* abandoned by him. Second: Jesus *did not* react to their panic. Nor to their accusation, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Let's think about that accusation for a moment. Staying asleep as the storm threatened to kill them, the disciples decided: "He does not care. He is just leaving us to die in this storm out here all on our own."

How often when God does *not* solve our problems or ease our distress in the way we would like God to do, do we also think: "Well then, God doesn't really care, after all. Or worse, "God isn't there at all." I think we do this same thing when we expect people to help us or take care of us in a particular way. We become disappointed or even infuriated because they don't rescue us in the way we expect them to.

So first, Jesus was with them in the boat; and second, Jesus did not react to their panic. And third: Jesus chose to address *the source of their panic*, the storm. The same word translated as "great windstorm" in verse 37 "*lai-lops*" is the word in Job 38:1, in our first lesson, translated as "whirlwind." The very one who laid the foundations of the earth, was with them in the boat! Like God who asked Job: "Who said, "Here shall your proud waves be stopped?" Jesus stopped these proud waves. He stilled the storm with his words, we are told here in Mark, by "*rebuking*" it. That verb "rebuke" is used when Jesus exorcises demonic powers. A more literal translation of what Jesus said to stop the storm in our story, rather than "Peace! Be still!" is this: "Be silent! Be muzzled!"

Friends: The monster is bad. Whoever, whatever that may be for you and for me. And for us as a whole. They are bad. But Jesus is "badder!" Jesus rose from the dead, slaying all the monsters within and around us. Can you believe this? Or, as Jesus questioned his awestruck disciples, "*Are you still without faith?*" A mustard seed amount of faith is enough. That was the parable Jesus' ended his teaching from the boat directly prior to this storm story. We are not the

wind, God is. We don't have to see or understand God's ways, our job is to open our sail to let Christ power our ship in the face of the storm. Let come what may. Blow, wind, blow.

Although they are legion, let's focus on one monster for a moment. The monster called "hate." There's a lot of hate swirling around right now, here locally, in our nation, and all over the world. But this is not the first time in history that hate has escalated into horrific violence and war. In 2020, Seventy-five years after the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, where nearly 1 million Jews were killed, close to 200 people gathered in Ithaca, New York, to explore the continuing question of the role moral courage plays in confronting hate. How it was the ordinary people could say with their actions, "Be silent! Be muzzled!"

As a young child in World II Poland, Nobel Prize-winning chemist Roald Hoffmann and members of his family spent 15 months hiding in an attic, kept safe by a Ukrainian couple who risked their own three small children to be his lifeboat. His life was spared thanks to the kindness and courage of others. Back in 1994, Eva Fogelman conducted over 300 interviews with rescuers of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. She asked them why they were willing to risk their lives for others. Here is what she discovered: They came from every gender, religion, class and political affiliation. What they all shared were these characteristics: they were raised in a home open to others; and in a home where they were not taught to fear authority; at an early age they were exposed to suffering people; they had experienced being marginalized; they had been adventuresome kids, taught to test their own limits; and they did not feel alone.¹

I'm sure they also shared the fear of stepping out, stepping up. That's part of the boat ride we call life. But, like Jesus, took action to silence and muzzle the monster of hate. What monsters, without and within are we being called to silence right now? Voter suppression, white nationalism, gun violence, are three of them, fueled in part, by the monster of hate. Being afraid is being human. Silencing the demonic powers with Jesus' song of death-defying love is what we, like those rescuers in the Holocaust, can do and are called to do.

Poet Joy Harjo, who belongs to the Muscogee Nation wrote dials in our fear and our hope in her poem titled, "Call It Fear." Here is part of it:

*There is this edge where shadows
and bones of some of us walk
Backwards.
Talk backwards. There is this edge.
Call it an ocean of fear of the dark. Or
name it with other songs. Under our ribs
our hearts are bloody stars. Shine on
shine on and horses in their galloping flight
strike the curve of ribs.*

*Heartbeat
And breathe back
Sharply. Breathe
Backwards.
This is this edge within me.*

*I saw it once on August Sunday morning
when the heat hadn't
left this earth. And Goodluck
sat sleeping next to me in the truck.
We had never broken through
the edge of the
Singing at four A.M.
We had only wanted to talk, to hear
any other voice to stay alive with—*

*And there was this edge...
Pulling me..
into the music
barely coming through
Sunday church singing
from the radio. Battery worn-
down but the voices
talking backwards.ⁱⁱ*

Perhaps your battery feels worn down. And the edge of fear stays stubborn and sharp in your gut. If so, take this one message into your heart: Jesus is with you in the boat in the face of the storm. Jesus who commands the wind and the sea, has also been to the edge, to the heart of darkness. Jesus who has been to the upside down, Jesus who has experienced utter abandonment. From the cross even Jesus cried out to God, feeling forsaken, saying something like, "Do you not care that I'm perishing here?" He chose to do that for you and for me. And for our world. Listen and you will hear the Sunday church singing.

If you are feeling more on the upside today, what monster are you being called to rebuke and silence? The Divine Spark inside every one of us gives us the capacity to be a rescuer, in small ways and large. Take it from Jesus: A mustard seed of faith is enough. We have deacons ready to be ordained and installed who know this. We have campers and helpers ready to share and discover this, starting tomorrow at VBS. We have a family of refugees God is bringing to Marshfield that we along with our Co-Sponsorship Team #3 have been chosen to sponsor. We are being called to be their life boat, a safe place to find refuge and being a new life. These are some of the ways we can be the ship, the nave that navigates and rescues. Jesus came to be human, so that we could be human, like Jesus showed us. Just as we are. Friends: Jesus is in the boat with us. Just imagine what *together* we could do. Thanks be to God.

ⁱ <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2020/02/panel-examines-jewish-rescuers-during-holocaust>.

ⁱⁱ "Call It Fear," by Joy Harjo, *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems 1975-2001*, (Norton: New York, NY, 2002), pp.29-30.