

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**June 20, 2021**

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**Clarksburg, WV**

**Mark 4:35-41**

(Jesus) said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith” (Mark 4:40 N.R.S.V.)

## Sailing Into the Storm

When I was a boy, I often went with my father to check on the cows. The farm was about 3 miles from our house. So sometimes when a cow was in labor, we would just stay there until the calf was born. I remember one such winter night when I was perhaps eight or nine years-old. While were waiting for a calf to be born, I fell asleep there in the barn on some hay.

Suddenly a terrible loud noise jerked me out of my sleep. My heart was pounding and I was sure something awful was happening. But then I realized that my dad was sitting there calmly beside me, he was not afraid. I immediately began to calm down and I realized that the terrible noise that had awoken me was only the horses running by the barn door, their hoofs thundering on the frozen ground.

I thought that was an appropriate story today both because it is Father’s Day and we are celebrating and thanking all of the good fathers and father figures in our lives. But also because it reminded me of how Jesus calmed the disciples fears in our text for today.

The story in our text operates on more than one level. On the one level it is a story about something that happened long ago and far away. On another level it is a parable of how God works in our lives when we are facing difficult times.

Looking back at the text and its original setting, Jesus and the disciples had been teaching and preaching and dealing with the crowds all day. It was evening and they were all exhausted. Jesus told them to go over to the other side of the lake. One would suppose the idea was that the disciples were tired and needed to get away from the crowd to rest.

However, as they are going, a terrible storm comes up that threatens to swamp the boat. It is worth noting that several of the disciples were experienced fishermen. Experienced fishermen would not panic easily. The fact that they were terrified, means that this must have been an usually bad storm.

The good news is that they have Jesus with them. It is worth noting that our text says that Jesus said to the disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Now listen to this. “And leaving the

crowd behind, they took (Jesus) with them in the boat, just as he was.” In Mark 9, Jesus takes the disciples with him when he goes up the mountain to be transfigured. But here we are told that the disciples take Jesus with them. It makes me wonder what would have happened if they had left Jesus on the shore and gone on without him?

So the good news is that Jesus is with the disciples. The not so good news is that Jesus is asleep. They have to wake him up. Can you relate to that? Are there times when you have been in one of life’s storms and you wondered if Jesus was asleep. Here you are drowning in bad things and chaos and you wondered, “Where is Jesus?” “Is he asleep?” “Doesn’t he care?”

That is what the disciples want to know. They ask Jesus, “We are drowning, don’t you care?” And he gets up and rebukes the wind and the waves and they become calm.

Jesus does care, but his caring often seems strange to us. Jesus could have steered the disciples around the storm. He could have stilled the storm before it became a threat. But he chose to wait. Sometimes Jesus steers us around the storm, but sometimes he steers us through the storm. Sometimes he acts quickly. Sometimes he delays.

Jesus then asks the disciples, “Have you still no faith?”

In this case faith is defined as a determination to trust Jesus even in the midst of bad things happening, even when he doesn’t act as quickly as we would like. Faith means that neither the storm nor the delay is evidence that Jesus doesn’t care.

Trusting Jesus in this way is not easy. But then if it was easy, we wouldn’t call it faith.

*Dynamic Preaching had a story about a woman named Chastity Patterson. A few years ago her father died. After his death, Chastity continued to send daily text messages to his old phone number. She said that she wanted to feel like he was still there, still sharing the ups and downs of her daily life. It was her way of dealing with a storm of grief. For four years she sent daily messages to his old phone number. And then one day she got a reply.*

*The text she received said, “My name is Brad and I lost my daughter in a car wreck on August 2014. Your messages have kept me alive. When you text me, I know it’s a message from God.” He went on to say how moved he was by Chastity’s handling of the challenges in her life over the past four years.*

*Chastity shared their text exchange on social media to show her family and friends, “that there is a God and it might take four years, but he shows up right on time!” (Published June 20, 2021, pg. 41)*

Looking back at our text from Mark, we note that after Jesus calmed the sea and the wind, the disciples asked, “Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him.” We are told that they said this with awe. But it is possible to take this a couple of different ways. It is possible that the

disciples were simply in awe of the power that Jesus displayed. Or it could be that they were asking a slightly different question. Who is this that sends us into the storm?

Surely the one who has the power to make the sea and the wind obey him also has the power to stop this in the first place. Who then is this that sends us into a storm? Is that any way to treat your friends?

Jesus does care, but sometimes his caring sends us into storms we would rather avoid. It has been suggested that God sends us into storms, not only to do his necessary work, but also to build our character, to increase our faith and trust in him.

Do you suppose that when Jesus asked the disciples, “Have you still no faith? ,” they might have said, “Oh, yes, Lord, we have faith now. No need for more storms. We are all good now.”

I could see myself saying that. But if the disciples said that, it is not recorded. What is recorded is that they went on to demonstrate amazing faith in spreading the good news of the gospel against all odds.

I want to pick up on another thing that Jesus said in our text. Jesus said to the disciples, “Let us go over to the others side.” There may well be something symbolic in that statement. The lake of Galilee was a border of sorts. On the West side of the lake, Jewish culture predominated. But on the East Side of the Lake, Roman culture predominated.

Jesus himself often went over to the other side. He spoke with women, with Samaritans, with those afflicted by mental illness, with prostitutes, to those sick with leprosy, tax collectors like Matthew and Zaccheaus, and dying on the cross he spoke to the thief hanging beside him.

We human beings have a tendency to mistrust and stay away from those who do not look or sound like us. We want nothing to do with people who are from the other side. Yet, Jesus cares about the people on the other side too. And he often sends us to them. And yes, sometimes that means sailing into the storm.

Wil Willmon tells about a young woman he knows who had a religious experience at summer camp. She gave her life to Christ. And she was told by an adult at camp that now that she had done so, all of the things that bothered her about herself and other people would be fixed by her relationship to Christ.

It didn't turn out that way, she got back home at the end of the summer. She showed up at her high school, and said a little prayer that Jesus would give her a wonderful junior year. But some of her friends just didn't understand the change in her. She was mocked by some at a party, “Look at Miss Christian!” Some of her classmates were openly hostile toward her. “What gives you the right to think you are better than me?” She tried to explain that she didn't feel that way, but she was unable to change their misunderstanding. (Wilmon, “Preaching Resources, June 2021, pg. 37)

Becoming a Christian does not solve all your problems or fix all your relationship. It doesn't.

Popular Christianity often portrays God as the one who rescues us from all dangers. It takes no particular faith to follow such a god. But it also adds nothing to the depth and joy of life in the kingdom.

God as revealed in scripture is much more demanding. Sometimes he rescues us from danger. Other times God sends us into danger. Sometimes God responds to our pleas quickly, other time God seems to delay. Serving the God of scripture is rewarding beyond measure. But it also requires faith. If it were easy or automatic, we wouldn't call it faith.

Storms or bad things will come to everyone. That is a fact of life. But we do have a choice. We can see the storms as obstacles to a selfish kind of happiness. Or we can see the storm as opportunities to grow in faith.

A very spiritually wise woman in a previous congregation once said to me, "I find it exciting when I'm pushed to the wall by events beyond my control. Because then, I get to see God in action."

What is God saying to you today?

Amen.