

Sermon ✝ June 20, 2021

Mark 4:35-41

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The noted minister Jerome Engel was annoyed by an old gentleman who fell asleep during his sermon several Sundays in a row. He noted that a small boy always sat with the man; so one Sunday after the service, he took the boy aside and said, “*Son, who's the elderly gentleman you always sit with?*” “*Grandpa,*” was the reply. “*Well,*” promised Pastor Engel, “*If you'll keep him awake during the sermon, I'll give you a quarter each week.*”

That sounded like a good arrangement and so for the next two weeks, the older gentleman was very attentive. But the third week, he dropped off soundly to sleep. Following the service, Engel cornered the boy and said, “*Didn't you agree to keep him awake every week for a quarter?*” “*Yes, sir,*” said the boy, “*but now grandpa gives me a dollar not to disturb him.*”

There are a lot of humorous stories about people sleeping in church. Of course, my favorite cartoon depicts a preacher slumped over his pulpit, eyes shut with his manuscript in his hand, and then originating from his mouth there is a long line of “z’s”. The caption reads: *A particularly dull sermon.*

I would like us to think about sleeping this morning . . . but you need to stay awake. The sleeping I want us consider was far more significant—it revealed the set of values the sleepers had. There are many biblical examples of people sleeping. Today’s text offers one instance.

With his companions one day in a small boat, Jesus was so tired that he fell into a sound sleep. While he slept, a storm arose on the lake. And he slept on until the disciples, paralyzed with fear, awoke him and asked him to help them.

There is another instance in Mark’s gospel. It is in the fourteenth chapter. Near the end of his life, Jesus was very sorrowful and asked his disciples to stand watch for him while he prayed. More than once during that troublesome evening, he found his disciples sound asleep.

These two biblical passages reflect the “values” of the sleepers. In a time of physical danger, Jesus was not afraid at all. However, in a time of spiritual danger, Jesus was exceedingly troubled. Both of these incidents point us to the need we all have to get our values straight. We need to know when to worry and when we can sleep.

The novelist, E.M. Forester, once observed that there is much to be worried about as we speculate on the future of the world. “*One has two duties . . . to be worried and not to be worried. And not to be worried is very important because you cannot enjoy or understand the world around you if you're in a fuss all the time.*”

So it is that one of our two duties is *to be worried*. Of course, worry fills the world. We live in the age of anxiety. We are constantly advised to reduce tension and stress in our lives. Preachers often present religion as a sedative for nerves and a guaranteed way to peace of mind. And yet, with all

that's done to lessen and relieve it . . . anxiety is everywhere.

It needs to be emphasized that most anxiety comes from self interest. A doctor surveyed a number of patients . . . as to what their worries were:

- 40% worried about things that never happened.
- 30% worried about past happenings or things over which they had absolutely no control.
- 12% worried about health despite the fact that they were perfectly well.
- 10% worried over relatives and friends who were fully able to take care of themselves.

It is our duty to be worried, but not about our individual fears and uncertainties. There are some things we ought to care about deeply . . . the big issues of life, the great problems of our time, the real burdens of people.

There are great needs in society. We should be worried about global warming and gun violence and world hunger and equality and justice for all people. In observing and sensing human need and identifying ourselves with these needs, it's a duty to be worried. It's not a time to sleep.

On the other hand, it's an equally important duty not to be worried. Even in the worst situations of his life, amid all of the controversy and chaos, Jesus was inwardly calm. What was his secret? First, he did all there was to do, did all that he could do . . . and left it at that. And that's all that God expects of any of us. Yet, some folks try to do even more . . . more than Jesus, himself, would do. We know these people! We may even be these people!

The second part of the secret—Jesus possessed the peace that passes all understanding because he believed that God would always be there—he had faith. He was assured that the love of God was a constant in his life.

We need to have faith. Without such faith, we must face all the problems of life alone. Depending only on our own intelligence and strength, we have good reason to worry. The power that's behind the universe is behind us and that should give us some peace of mind.

While Jesus slept in the boat as it rocked about on the Sea of Galilee, he didn't worry, he had faith. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he considered the sorry state of humanity. It was a time to worry and not for sleep.

St. Mark encourages us to get things straight with God. To evaluate/reevaluate our values, to be concerned with the big issues of life. And, above all to remember that we are loved by God. And that this same God will never let us down. Amen.

