

Being the Peace We Want for Our World

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

June 23, 2024

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

The Gospel Story of the disciples and Jesus caught out on the Sea of Galilee in a storm is told by Matthew, Luke, and Mark. But, as with many of the stories that they all tell, there are slight differences in the details. Only Mark sets this story in the evening, a context fraught with uncertainty, and danger.¹ The storyteller also notes that Jesus was taken out in the boat 'Just as he was'², implying that there were no precautions taken.

Of course, like any great story, this is a drama that verges on the absurd. The sudden storm, the disciples gripped by fear, and Jesus, fast asleep at the stern of the boat. The sea throughout the Bible³ is associated with chaos that the divine, God, Jesus, quiets harshly orders the wind "Be quiet!" Throughout the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus uses this command a few times, usually to dramatically silence annoying people, as well as quieting an "unclean spirit"⁴ and a diabolic force that threatens human life⁵.

Back to that moment on the stormy sea, the waters quiet immediately. Jesus, always a teacher, makes this into a learning moment, asking, rhetorically, why his friends showed little faith, not trusting in divine power to help them through. My thought, though, imagining myself in that situation, is: easier said than done when one thinks they are going to die! Right?

As so many do, who, like me, spend their careers listening for a living, I regularly go to a professional that I pay to listen to me. Recently, I have become more aware than ever of a variety of narratives that play out in my own head, too often based more in fear or worry rather than fact. I have a hunch that many, if not, all of us, can relate to that from time to time – stormy seas churning inside of us.

Add to this context of anxiety the fact that there are countless sources of messages dripping with fear and insecurity looping outside of us – on social media, in coffee shop conversations. With messages of anxiety of fear inside us and outside of us, we have the makings of a metaphorical "perfect storm."

I can't control the world's lack of peace for the most part, though I would love to, but I can do something about storm brewing in my thought processes. I can relate to those disciples in the Mark's dramatic scene – in the dark, storm, irritation at the person who seems unphased by the storm.

¹ Much of the spirit of this Message thanks to the commentary on Mark 4: 35-41, by C. Clifton Black (June 23, 2024) in WorkingPreacher.com. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-6>

² See Mark chapter 4 verse 36

³ Much of the analysis of this Bible reading thanks to

⁴ Also in Mark, chapter 1, verse 25

⁵ Mark chapter 4, verse 39

Of course, there is no magic solution to this challenge. This Bible story does not offer a solution, but, rather, it does ask a question that is relevant to our lives. The voice of Jesus in Mark asks the disciples, and us, “Why are you afraid?”⁶ Becoming more aware of those dramatic scripts that play out in our heads daily is the first step towards finding the faith in us to respond to the storms of our lives. Those voices in our heads – “I’m not strong enough”, or, “I’m not brave enough”, or, “I’m not as talented as that person over there!”

“Catastrophizing” is a storm that whips up in my mental dramas, all of those “what ifs”, trying to manage all the question marks in my life. The truth is, though, that you and I have a limited ability to really feel ready for the big storms in life. But here is the thing, the good news: the gift that I have found in recent personal work that I have done, perhaps relevant for a few others, is that I have the resources to deal with anything, emotionally or spiritually. If it isn’t within my personal capacity, then people who love me and support me will help me to find those resources.

I, we, can weather any storm. We might be shaken, our boats might become battered, but we will get through it. Sometimes we can do it on our own, but more often we need help. Divine help, practical help that our support people want to offer us.

Reflecting on this Sunday’s message evoked a memory for me from 1989, when I was travelling. I was on my own, backpacking, which was perfect for me, but at times when I got into some sort of trouble, far away from my usual supports of family and friends, I had some uncertainty. But then, life would surprise me. I had moments of wallowing in self pity in a public place, and sometimes I sat there, scared and alone, for awhile. But inevitably, if I dared to look around me, someone would come along to try to help. Or, once I bumped into a person in a strange Italian hostel who had the same accent as me. I turned out that the person was from my childhood city of Oshawa, though I had never before met them. Their home was only blocks from where I grew up. Life, and God’s unfolding universe, can sometimes be like that.

Jesus in the story of the stormy Sea of Galilee, comes across as rather like a naggy parent with his friends, asking rhetorically, “Have you still no faith?” Well, hello!! We are dying out here! There are moments of doubt, of profound uncertainty and worry in our lives and in our world. To have faith, in this sense, is not, I believe, so much about *not being afraid*. We all feel afraid and that doesn’t mean we don’t trust our Creator. Rather, leaning into faith helps us not to be paralyzed by our fear.

When I observe the modern politics of fear mongering at play not just in the United States or Russia or Israel and Gaza, I see how people in power capitalize on the storms brewing in the thought processes of everyday citizens. When we are not aware of our fears, we are vulnerable like that. I invite you to see this stormy sea story of Jesus and the disciples today through your personal lens of fear. I invite you to pay attention to

⁶ Mark chapter 4, verse 40

your own customized scripts of fear, or bitterness, or insecurity. That, I think, is the beginning of healing work that I think we all, as frail, vulnerable human creatures need to be doing, replacing those scripts of fear with more life-giving, life-affirming ones.

We are to be the peace that we want for the world. That quote is popularly attributed to Gandhi, but that is disputed. It still is a wonderful quote, especially as we come to terms with the lack of peace in our world. As we work on seeking peace in our own thoughts and actions, may we hold firmly to the truth claimed by our Biblical faith, that God will give us the tools we need to bring peace and wholeness internally, so we can bring that peace and wholeness to our neighbourhoods and world. Amen.