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Sermon – Mark 4:35-41

June 24, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, God our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

Storms are fascinating weather systems. At the intersection point of different temperatures, pressures, humidity, wind directions and speed and so much more I don’t understand . . . at the place where these things come together there can be dramatic effects . . . tornados, hurricanes, blizzards, huge downpours. Can you recall a storm you’ve lived through or even the worst storm you’ve lived through? Did it include high winds? Was the snow so thick that you had to dig yourself out of your house or tie a rope to your back porch so you didn’t get lost in the yard? Did it hail the size of golf balls? Or did the sand become air bourn and cut off your ability to see? How many trees came down in your yard and how long was the power out? How long was it between the flashes of lightening and the sounds of thunder . . . one thousand one, one thousand two. Were you on land or on the water? And how big were the waves?

Were you here for the big wind storm of 2006 (I believe)? We were warned about the coming storm, but still when howling wind and shaking house woke me in the night, I was amazed at the power of nature and prayed it wouldn’t overpower my house. In the Greater Seattle Area there were trees and power lines down everywhere. My friend’s cousin had 2 trees fall on his house . . . he called a dozen friends to try and get some help, and everyone showed up. His family was terrified in the night . . . in a storm there is plenty to fear.

Will we be safe? Will our family be safe? Will we have a home or how bad will the damage be? How long will it take the insurance to sort it out? For how long will we remain without power? Will we be able to get food and supplies? What will the lasting effects be on our finances? Who will help us? Will we recover before the next storm hits? There is plenty to fear . . . and if you read the scripture closely, you will notice how Jesus doesn’t contradict this. Jesus doesn’t say, ‘you have nothing to fear.’ Jesus says, “*why* are you afraid?” Why are you choosing fear, instead of turning to God, the One who moved on the waters and brought all of this into being?

This was a real danger on the Sea of Galilee. According to NT Wright, “it isn’t only boats that are in danger . . . to this day, the car parks on the western shore have signs warning drivers of what happens in high winds. The sea can get very rough very quickly, and big waves can swamp cars parked on what looked like a safe beach . . . when the wind suddenly gets up . . . a boat on the lake . . . gets tossed around like a child’s toy.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It was all Jesus’ idea to go across on the boat. It had been a long day, he had talked for hours, speaking in parables, explaining the parables. Their brains are fried – they can’t take in another thing and all they want to sleep, but knowing the unpredictable weather on the water, bone tired and all churned up inside, they keep awake . . . and they were glad they did when the wind picks up out of nowhere. The storm consumes their minds and hearts – the only thing they can think about is how to stay alive.

While the storm has quickly become the centre of their reality, Jesus continues to be at peace, asleep in the corner of the boat. He didn’t have the same thought before going to sleep, he didn’t worry about a possible storm; as always, his focus is on God. Meanwhile the lessons for the disciples have only just begun; they thought the parables were the teaching of the day, but when they wake the one who speaks in parables, he does something they cannot explain. They wake him to say, ‘you should be panicking! Do you not care we’re all going to die?’ But instead of coming into their reality, he brings them into his, and gives them a taste of that kingdom power he had been talking about all day.

Sometimes the storm around us can be a reflection of what is happening within us. Our internal realities are powerful at creating external mirrors of themselves, and are very skilled at blinding us to God’s promise. Have you ever had a quiet moment in your imagination to take stock of who all is in there? Around the circle in your mind’s eye you might have your most adult self or your professional self; then maybe an expression of who you were at 4 or 15; next to them perhaps your obsessive self who gets super anxious if things aren’t quite right; your emotional self, who tends to be overly dramatic; then your scared self who is always hiding in the closet or wrapped in a blanket; don’t forget your creative self, who is like an idea machine and a total goofball. You look all around the circle and see all these parts of yourself and in the centre you find your higher self, your centre of grounding and wisdom, and the self who is most connected with our Creator.

When storms come, either internal or external, the parts of ourselves from around the circle forget their place and occupy the space in the middle, acting like little monsters, while overshadowing our higher selves. The 4 year old may have a tantrum; the creative self might spend all day distracting with games and humour; the scared self might stay rigid in the corner for hours. In the midst of the storm it’s hard to kind of pop out of that reality and recognize that you’re in it. Especially in intense storms, we tend to have no perspective, and just go through them as if they’re the ultimate reality. So, the work in the storm is to locate our higher selves so as to access the peace of God. We can cut through it all by visiting the ocean or the forest, or perhaps you locate God’s peace in a compassionate, affirming friend, or maybe you turn to Jesus in scripture or prayer for some perspective, or maybe your way is to do something physical. I had a professor in seminary, Alexandra Kovats, who gave us these little finger monsters as a reminder to put those little out of control monster selves back in the circle where they belong, so our higher selves, which are close to God, can claim their space. Seeking God in the storm is our only hope.

Many years ago I heard an intriguing little story in which I put a lot of faith. I can’t remember where I heard it. There was a wise one who was called into a land suffering from drought. Upon arrival he sat down on a hill in the shade of a tree and settled himself into meditation. The people kept saying, why are you not calling for rain? The wise one just kept sitting there; days went by and the people were beside themselves. Finally the rain came and revived the land. How did you do it, they asked? I came here and brought myself into balance so the land around me could come into balance. Jesus woke and calmed the storm; he brought hope and peace to thousands during his ministry just by being in their presence. He had so mastered his internal world that he was able to effect external change. Faith in God’s promise is then not so much a belief to walk around with, but a life-long practice of turning to God, letting go of our fear and opening ourselves in praise.

It takes a lot of courage and faith to turn from our fretting and seek God in the midst of the storm. It seems so counter intuitive, but the source of life is the originator of everything good, hopeful, joyful, creative, and transforming. God doesn’t promise a storm-free life or a storm-free world, but God is working in the storm and is the God of all creation through the storm. We are invited to boot that little monster out of the center and praise God the one who brings life, hope, possibilities. While storms are created by the confluence of many factors, these factors also create rainbows, gentle snowfall, and sunshine with an ocean breeze. Thanks be to God for life!

1. Mark for Everyone, NT Wright, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)