

June 21, 2021 Pentecost 4B  
Mark 4:35-41  
What's on the Other Side?

*That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."<sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" <sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" <sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

Our Gospel lesson today starts with Jesus telling His disciples "Let's go the other side" of the lake. That would be the Sea of Galilee. We might want to ask "What's on the other side?" But what was important for the disciples that day and for us is not what was on the other side but what lay between where they were and where they were going. It was what was in the middle that was important, not what was on the other side. Jesus' statement, "Let's go to the other side" started a roller coaster of faith opportunities for the disciples. Let's look at it.

Jesus had been teaching and healing and teaching and healing and He couldn't get a break. Mark tells us that at one point so many people were trying to get to Jesus that one group was only able to avoid the crowds by going up on the roof and making a hole in the roof to get their sick friend to Jesus (Mark 2). And in the midst of all this, He finds Himself dealing with accusations of blasphemy from the Pharisees for claiming to forgive sins.

He is exhausted by the time this story begins. And the disciples took Jesus in the boat, "just as He was" (whatever Mark means by that—It probably goes back to 4:1 where He had gotten in the boat to teach and was still there). And then...the storm started.

Now Jesus knew that the storm was coming. He was God. He knows that stuff. And the disciples, 4 of them at least, were seasoned fisherman. They

had spent their lives on the sea and part of their livelihood depended on them being able to read the sea and the weather. They probably had a pretty good idea that the storm was coming. And it came and it was a big one. So big that the waves came over the side of the boat and the boat began to sink.

And Jesus, well Jesus' response to the storm was to use that break to take a nap in the back of the boat. And this wasn't just a case of Jesus leaning up against the side of the boat, closing His eyes and drifting off. Mark makes a point of telling us that Jesus has His head on a cushion. He has made a place for Himself to sleep. Jesus is exhausted and He is sleeping, on purpose, through a raging storm.

And then Mark tells us that the disciples woke Him up. Now you know there is probably more to it than that. There were no doubt some "Should we wake Him up?" and "I'm not going to wake Him up. Peter, you're the favorite. You wake Him up."

But they woke Him up and they said—and this is interesting—they said, "Teacher, *don't you care* if we drown (literally, 'perish')?" Not "Jesus, we have an emergency here and need you to do something" or "Teacher, wake up, our lives are in danger!" but, "Teacher, *don't you care* if we perish?"

A funny thing to say to someone who came so that none should "*perish, but have eternal life.*" But we know how we get in stress. We over-react. We twist reality. We create problems that aren't there. So this is the disciples being just like us.

And Jesus does what Jesus does. He gets up, stops the wind, says to the waves, "Peace! Be still." And everything calms down and everyone is safe. Just Jesus doing Jesus-stuff.

Now if the story ends here, it has a whole different meaning. If the story ends here the disciples are celebrating their safety and their wise choice in waking Jesus up. They had a problem. They called on Jesus. He dealt with the problem. Good job, boys! Give yourselves a high five (or whatever fishermen on the Sea of Galilee did to congratulate themselves.

But the story doesn't end there. Jesus throws a major wrench in that interpretation when He says, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

In other words, whatever lesson Jesus had for them in the trip to the other side—they failed. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" F minus. Big fat goose egg.

Where did they go wrong? They forgot who was in the boat with them in the middle of the storm. And they didn't realize that the One who is stronger than the storm goes with us through the storms to grow us and teach us and transform us. They missed out on that lesson. Not to mention, missing out on the first all water-powered roller coaster ride in history. It wasn't what was on the other side that was important. It was what Jesus had to show them on the way to the other side.

Who would have guessed that 15 months ago, as we entered the COVID-19 storm, what Jesus would show us in the storm as He took us to the other side? Who would have guessed how long it was going to last? But Jesus went into that with us and used it to teach us and grow us and transform us. We have learned new ways of being the church. We've learned about new doors in the church through technology that we didn't know how to use before. So if we want to "get back to normal," we missed the whole point of Jesus taking us to the other side. Now we have to take this new transformation and go with it.

Right now our city is in the midst of a storm of injustice and violence. Jesus is with us in the storm. And He is with us to teach us and transform us and use us. This One who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," has a role for us in the storm. And He will take us to the other side. But right now we are in the storm and what God has for us in the storm is important.

It's like a pregnancy. When you are cross over from non-parent to parent. There is this thing in between—9 months of pregnancy. You can't speed it up. That time is critical to the child and to the parents. You don't want to come out of it too quickly. It could be harmful or even deadly to come out of that 9 month storm too quickly. That is a time of much-needed growth and preparation.

And this is true of any storm you face. Whether it's in a relationship, health-related, if it comes as part of your job—Jesus is with us in the storm and He is using the storm for our good—to teach us, grow us, transform us, prepare us—for something on the other side of the storm. If our goal is to get out of the storm as quickly as possible, we miss whatever He is doing in that storm. We have Jesus in the boat. He's bigger than the storm.

You see, sometimes, when He is ready, Jesus stops the storm. But sometimes He just wants to go through the storm with us, so He lets it rage. And we learn to lean on Him in the storm instead of all the other unhealthy things we have been leaning on.

What's on the other side? The real question is what stands between here and the other side?

Let's take the advice of the writer to the Hebrews and "Look to Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith." On one side was earth. On the other side was heaven. And in between stood you...and a storm—a storm of sin and death. A storm of death...and a cross. And for you, Jesus took on the storm on a cross and said to death and sin, "Peace! Be still!" And now this Jesus who defeats the biggest storms, goes with you into whatever storms you face. He is with you. He is in your boat. He's bigger than the storm.

So when the storm comes, turn to Him. There is no need for fear. When you get afraid, lean into Jesus. He's in the boat. And look for what He is showing you in the storm. Look at how He is growing you. Look at how he is preparing you to make a difference in the world.

And when that final wave comes—and it will come for all of us. We all have a wave that will finally sink our boat—and when it comes and we finally get to the other side, we don't want to get there saying "Oh what suffering I endured. Oh what crosses I had to bear. Oh how hard my life was." No, no no. We want to arrive on the side, in heaven, saying, "What a ride! What a ride!"

Amen.