In the Trough
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
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Scripture Reading Mark 4:35-41

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the
other side.’ 36And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as
he was. Other boats were with him. 37A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the
boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38But he was in the stern, asleep
on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that
we are perishing?’ 39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace!
Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40He said to them, ‘Why
are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ 41And they were filled with great awe and said
to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

Can we talk about fear? Anxiety? Worry? Storms that threaten to swamp the boat?

If you are not a calm person, this story might challenge you. When life is stormy, if you have a hard time staying calm, this story might frustrate you. If you are an insomniac, struggling to get to sleep or waking in the middle of the night with the crashing waves of whatever storm was on your mind when you went to bed, this story might seem like the wildest fantasy imaginable.

I wonder if this resonates with any of you?

As someone who cannot sleep through storms actual or metaphorical, I boggle that Jesus sleeps through a storm that threatens to overturn the whole boat. I would definitely be the disciple taking Jesus by the shoulders, shouting over the wind, yelling at Jesus: ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ *I mean, seriously! I’m very upset here! Why aren’t you upset? Wake up!*

Jesus is in the same boat with the disciples, but he does not freak out when the storm comes in.

The storm itself could not have been a surprise. Probably Jesus expected to encounter a storm. “The setting is the Sea of Galilee, a body of water 680 feet below sea level, surrounded by hills, and prone to sudden, violent windstorms.”[1] And it’s night. Jesus says, let’s go across this body of storm-prone body of water in the middle of the night. So that I can take a nap.

This story starts with Jesus saying, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ Now there are many ways you can interpret going across to the other side: there’s a literal lake to cross. There are new and different communities to meet on the other side. A different meaning occurred to me this week. Let us go across to the other side may mean, I know we can make it across a stormy sea together. I know *there is another* side. I can see the far shore and even if our boats begin to rock, I rest assured.

Sometimes Jesus could be just a little bit more detailed in his instructions. Perhaps if he’d said before they set off from shore, listen everyone - a storm is coming but we will make it…

Well. Even if he had said that, the disciples still would have worried.

This was, after all, a great gale. In the Greek, a *mega* storm.

Jesus could see the other side, Jesus could see the horizon, but they could not.

Jesus was always teaching his disciples, even when he was asleep. That night, he was trying to say: there is another side. We will get to the other shore. I am right here, even in the mega storm.
We often hear Jesus’ words this way:

Have you still no faith? (A rebuke)

But could they be a nurturing, loving, invitation to have faith?

Oh beloved. Have faith. We’re going to get to the other side.

Now here’s the thing. We’re all still working on having faith in midst of the mega storms of our lives. Being afraid is a central part of the human condition, it seems. As

[1] https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1813-crossing-to-the-other-side

followers of Jesus, though, we have some good news in the face of fear. I'm not going to say cures for fear - but at least tools.

The first is that we cling to the knowledge that Jesus is in the boat with us, in the midst of the storm. The one who has been through every storm imaginable is there in the boat with us, to guide us toward the other side, to strengthen us, to give us courage.

The second piece of good news for followers of Jesus who find ourselves in the midst of storms is that we are in the boat together. This is the blessing of being part of a faith community. We are never alone in the storm. We are in the boat together. Among our most sacred reasons for being church is to have companions when waves start swamping the boat. It only works, of course, when we've committed to being in the boat together before the storms hit. When those of us who can see the other side bless the ones who are getting tossed around with a word of calm, with a word of encouragement, with a word of grace.

We don't just have Jesus, we have each other. We are all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. We are all on the same sea.

I'm going to close with a poem today. It's a poem about what it feels like to be in the midst of a storm - and what it feels like, even in depths of a roiling sea, to settle in to trust that we will see the other side.

Trough
-Judy Sorum Brown

There is a trough in waves,
a low spot
where horizon disappears
and only sky
and water
are our company.
And there we lose our way
unless
we rest, knowing the wave will bring us
to its crest again.
There we may drown

if we let fear
hold us in its grip and shake us
side to side,
and leave us flailing, torn, disoriented.
But if we rest there
in the trough,
in silence,
being in the low part of the wave,
keeping our energy and
noticing the shape of things,
the flow,
then time alone
will bring us to another
place
where we can see
horizon, see land again,
regain our sense
of where
we are,
and where we need to swim.
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This day, may we trust that the storm will pass by.
May we trust that we will see the other side.
May we trust that we are not in the boat alone.
May we trust that Jesus is right there with us,
even when,
especially when,
we are most afraid.
Amen.

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Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: All the world is a very narrow bridge / The important thing is not to make oneself afraid," or "not to live from a place of fear"
https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2015/12/not-to-make-oneself-afraid.html
God Math is the miraculous nature of doing together we can do what none of us can do alone. - Courtney Stange-Tregear