

## Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

“Teacher, don’t you care if we perish?” (Mk. 4:38) These are the first words the disciples speak in today’s scripture reading. “Teacher, don’t you care if we perish?”

We can understand how terrified they are. The disciples are in a small fishing boat with Jesus, crossing the Sea of Galilee at night. [Just to get some perspective, the Sea of Galilee is roughly the size of Seneca Lake.] So here are the 12 disciples & Jesus, in their fishing boat at night,, when suddenly a storm comes up—with no warning—a fierce & powerful storm. Here’s a video that gives a feeling for the danger of the waves & wind. [Video] The disciples are rowing with all their strength, desperately trying to get to land. The waves crash over the sides of the boat, they’re taking on water faster than they can bail it out. Their muscles burn with exhaustion, their legs are bruised from being banged against the side of the vessel by the wild water. Soon, the boat will break apart or sink. And all this time, Jesus is sleeping peacefully in the stern. Suddenly, one of the disciples realizes that there’s a chance that Jesus could save them. In the few short weeks they’ve known him, he’s healed a paralyzed man, and a leper, and a man tormented by demons. Is it possible... Is it possible he could be powerful enough to stop the storm?

So, in the midst of the chaos of wind & wave, they wake him up: “Teacher, don’t you care if we perish?” [End video.]

This question is central—not just to this story—but to our own lives... especially in times of chaos: “Jesus, don’t you care if we perish?” We’ve known our share of chaos. Perhaps you’re experiencing chaos in your life right now, today. Chaos, when our family falls apart. Chaos, when friends betray us. Chaos, when an unexpected health crisis hits. Chaos, when we lose a job, or fail a course at school, or face hopeless financial problems. Chaos, in a sudden situation of danger. Chaos, when a loved one dies. And with the disciples, we want to shout to the Lord: “Lord, I’m drowning here! Don’t you care?”

Jesus cares. Caring in the midst of chaos—that’s the promise of this scripture. Jesus is there in the boat with the disciples. They are not abandoned in the storm. Jesus speaks words of power: “Peace! Be

still!” And the wind & the waves cease. Jesus cares—he responds with his presence and his power. That’s so important that I need to repeat it: Jesus cares—he responds with his presence and his power.

Today, as we celebrate Veteran’s Day Sunday, we know this has been the experience of countless men & women in the armed forces. As they have faced difficult, life-threatening combat, dangerous missions, they have sensed Christ’s presence by their side.

Think, for example, of the six courageous Marines who raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi during the battle for Iwo Jima during World War II. A famous statue outside Arlington Cemetery in Washington, DC, depicts this moment. [Show photo]. Now, a few years back, a tour bus had just dropped off a group of 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Wisconsin at the Iwo Jima Memorial. A man started talking with a few of them, and it turned out he was James Bradley, the son of one of the men depicted. Maybe because he was also from Wisconsin, he began to reverently address the whole group:

“The Boys of Iwo Jima” by Michael T. Powers

(From the book: *Heart Touchers: Life-Changing Stories of Faith, Love, and Laughter*)

[Each year my video production company is hired to go to Washington, D.C. with the eighth grade class from Clinton, Wisconsin where I grew up, to videotape their trip. I greatly enjoy visiting our nation's capitol, and each year I take some special memories back with me. This fall's trip was especially memorable.]

[On the last night of our trip, we stopped at the Iwo Jima memorial. This memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts one of the most famous photographs in history -- that of the six brave men raising the American flag at the top of Mount Surabachi on the Island of Iwo Jima, Japan during WW II. Over one hundred students and chaperones piled off the buses and headed towards the memorial. I noticed a solitary figure at the base of the statue, and as I got closer he asked, "What's your name and where are you guys from?"

I told him that my name was Michael Powers and that we were from Clinton, Wisconsin.

"Hey, I'm a Cheesehead, too! Come gather around Cheeseheads, and I will tell you a story."

James Bradley just happened to be in Washington, D.C. to speak at the memorial the following day. He was there that night to say good-night to his dad, who had previously passed away, but whose image is part of the statue. He was just about to leave when he saw the buses pull up. I videotaped him as he spoke to us, and received his permission to share what he said from my videotape. It is one thing to tour the incredible monuments filled with history in Washington, D.C. but it is quite another to get the kind of insight we

received that night. When all had gathered around he reverently began to speak. Here are his words from that night:]

"My name is James Bradley and I'm from Antigo, Wisconsin. My dad is on that statue, and I just wrote a book called *Flags of Our Fathers* which is #5 on the New York Times Best Seller list right now. It is the story of the six boys you see behind me. Six boys raised the flag.

The first guy putting the pole in the ground is Harlon Block. Harlon was an all-state football player. He enlisted in the Marine Corps with all the senior members of his football team. [A few days after the raising of the flag, Harlon died in battle at age 21.]

(He pointed to the statue)

You see this next guy? That's Rene Gagnon from New Hampshire. If you took Rene's helmet off at the moment this photo was taken, and looked in the webbing of that helmet, you would find a photograph. A photograph of his girlfriend. Rene put that in there for protection, because he was scared. He was eighteen years old. Boys won the battle of Iwo Jima. Boys. Not old men.

The next guy here, the third guy in this tableau, was Sergeant Mike Strank. Mike is my hero. He was the hero of all these guys. They called him the "old man" because he was so old. He was already twenty-four. [He also died in combat on Iwo Jima.]

The last guy on this side of the statue is Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona. Ira Hayes walked off Iwo Jima. He went into the White House with my dad. President Truman told him, "You're a hero." He told reporters, "How can I feel like a hero when 250 of my buddies hit the island with me and only twenty-seven of us walked off alive?"

The next guy, going around the statue, is Franklin Sousley from Hilltop, Kentucky, a fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. Franklin died on Iwo Jima at the age of nineteen.

The next guy, as we continue to go around the statue, is my dad, John Bradley from Antigo, Wisconsin, where I was raised. My dad lived there until his death in 1994, but he would never give interviews.

When I was a little boy, my third grade teacher told me that my dad was a hero. When I went home and told my dad that, he looked at me and said, "I want you always to remember that the heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who did not come back. DID NOT come back."

So that's the story about six nice young boys. Three died on Iwo Jima, and three came back as national heroes. Overall, 7000 boys died on Iwo Jima in the worst battle in the history of the Marine Corps. My voice is giving out, so I will end here. Thank you for your time."

There's a persistent rumor that there are 13 hands depicted on the statue. Here's a close-up photo. If you're like me, you can't see it well enough to count the hands. However, experts tell us there are only 12 hands visible on this sculpture. Still, I like the idea of 13 hands—it's just that one's not visible—and that's the hand of Christ. Jesus... caring... with his presence and his power... in the midst of chaos.

Just as we cannot see Christ's hand in this statue, we sometimes struggle to see Christ's hand in the events of our lives. Our attention is drawn to the chaos around us. We focus on the winds of destruction, the crashing waves of our worries and fears.

[Advance to next power point slide.]

And that's why the second powerful question in today's scripture passage is essential for us. Jesus asks his disciples: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Of course, the disciples are afraid. Anyone would be in a life-threatening situation like that. But Jesus doesn't want them to be drowning in fear. He reminds them of their faith in God. No doubt, in the years that followed, the disciples faced many stormy times. I bet they thought back to this night, and remembered Jesus' question. They had a choice: they could live in fear or they could live in faith.

As Christians, we have this same choice. When the storms of life threaten to overwhelm us, will we live in fear or will we live in faith?

God gives us many resources to help us live in faith: the words of the Bible to guide us, times of worship to renew us, prayer & private devotions to strengthen us, Christian friends to support us... All of these can help direct our attention away from our fears and toward our faith in Christ.

That's what happened to the actor Jimmy Stewart during WW II. He was 32 years old when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1941 and prepared to go overseas. When it came time to say good-bye to

his father, Alex Stewart choked up & couldn't get the words out. So he wrote his son a letter to read en route. After being shipped out, Jimmy read the words his father had been unable to say aloud:

"My dear Jim boy. Soon after you read this letter, you will be on your way to the worst sort of danger. Jim, I'm banking on the enclosed copy of the 91st Psalm. The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise of these words. I am staking my faith in these words. I feel sure that God will lead you through this mad experience. I can say no more. I only continue to pray. Goodbye, my dear [son]. God bless you and keep you. I love you more than I can tell you. Dad.

Jimmy Stewart's father was a veteran of the Spanish American War & WW I. He knew the gift of faith found in Psalm 91 for those preparing for battle. Now, Jimmy read these ancient words of promise:

**91** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
<sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."  
<sup>3</sup> For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;  
<sup>4</sup> he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.  
  
<sup>14</sup> Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;  
I will protect him, because he knows my name.  
<sup>15</sup> When he calls to me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble,  
I will rescue him and honor him.  
<sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy him,  
and show him my salvation.

Jimmy Stewart returned home a decorated war hero, unharmed even though his record included 20 combat missions. During the height of battle, Stewart said he learned to lean on the words of his tattered copy of Psalm 91. Upon returning home, he told his father: "What a promise for an airman. I placed in [God's] hands the squadron I would be leading. And, as the psalmist promised, I felt myself borne up."

*Victor Parachin, "God's 911," Christian Reader (Sept/Oct 2000), pp.67-68*

Psalm 91—it is one of many passages of the Bible that can strengthen our faith.

No doubt, you know what to do in an emergency, when you face a life-threatening crisis. You pull out your phone and dial 911.

I want to urge you to do the same thing in a spiritual crisis. Pull out your Bible, and dial 911, Psalm 91 that is: Psalm 91, verse 1:

**91** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
<sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."

Like the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, we will experience storms in life. However, Jesus is in the boat with us: caring in the midst of crisis. And we... we have a choice to make. Will we focus on our fears, or will we turn to Christ in faith?