

Roots
The Captain of the Storm

Good morning, glad to be here with you. Five of us from ZPC staff went to a worship conference a week ago and had a great time. One speaker reminded me that in church, we don't receive good advice, we receive good news. The word gospel means good news. And knowing that Jesus is God, that he is amazing, capable of miracles, able to wow us still, and he can use us in his kingdom in small and big way, that's really good news!

Our passage today is Mark 4:35-41, where Jesus calms a storm. Let's read God's Word.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But 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?" 39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Let's pray.

Lord may you open our minds to understand your Word, and move in our hearts to apply it to our lives. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Reading this story of Jesus calming the storm, you might be thinking... what is the biggest physical storm I've been in? I may have told this before, but I remember being around 12-13 years old, and I was playing Wiffle ball at Walt Holmes house on Brinkley Street in Walt's front yard. Walt and I were old enough we could be home without our parents, and it was on a weekday, I think all our parents were working. It was a hot summer day in Dallas, Texas where I grew up. The skies got darker and a summer storm was moving in.

The wind starting blowing stronger, so that even 12 year old boys knew we should go inside. But being 12, I decided to go to my home – so I got on my bike and began to ride the three blocks between my house and Walt's. As I rode, the skies seemed to turn black and close in on me, the wind blew harder, and the tornado siren went off. I pedaled faster.

I got home and went inside and hunkered down, alone and afraid. The tornado did come, but it missed me. It touched down about 4-5 miles from my home – and I was blessed to just be scared.

That day, there was a storm and there was fear, both were important. They were both important as they are in Mark's story too.

The Sea of Galilee is about 680 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills. It is kind of like water sitting in a bowl. Winds blowing down the hills can pick up speed and despite the fact the Sea of Galilee is actually small enough to see across it, it can have big storms.

We know earlier in Mark 4 Jesus had been teaching crowds of people, maybe he was tired and wanted to escape a little to get some rest. He fell asleep on the boat; on a cushion it says – probably in the stern – a honored spot scholars say, where there would be a cushion or carpets or arranged. So here's Jesus all snuggled up taking a nap when this huge storm is happening.

So we know of the disciples, at least the fisherman Peter, James and John, are fishermen and have been on fishing here – they must have seen big storms. It is big enough that they are afraid. I've always pictured Peter a rough tough guy with calloused hands, who often speaks without a filter. Some of the disciples, maybe Peter, wake Jesus up and say, "Jesus, get up, don't you care? We could drown here! Did you not see George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg in the Perfect Storm – that's what we're talking about here!"

So...Jesus got up, rebuked the wind, and said, "Quiet! Be still!" He could have been loud, but who can speak up over a roaring storm? God spoke the world into being, and said let there be light. Jesus is the Son of God and was there at creation. I imagine Jesus calmly standing and saying, to part of creation: "Quiet. Be still."

Our faith is often more caught than taught. What can we catch here?

The disciples are frantic, Jesus is asleep.

The disciples are scared, Jesus is calm.

The disciples say, "don't you care about us?!?" Jesus say, "Quiet, be still."

The disciples now have no storm to be afraid of, but still have fear. They are in awe of, who Jesus is. They say, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

So my sons Luke and Graham are learning a lot about writing in 6th grade – they are practicing using similes and metaphors. The storm in Mark 4 is a real storm, but as in most of scripture – it can be a metaphor for the storms in my life.

As Christians we often pray for people when they are in storms – especially when they are sick, or injured. I've often thought we don't pray for people by name who are dealing with depression, or dealing with an addiction, or worried about losing their family's

finances. We don't lift those names up in prayer publicly. But those storms are real. The fears that come with those storms are real too.

What do we do when faced with those storms? Often we do one of two things. For some of us – many here at ZPC, we try to fix it. What's the storm, the problem, I can fix that. I'll take care of it – I can make it right. But sometimes relational things aren't easily fixable, or health issues, or even dealing with things like depression or addiction – those need help.

Others of us, like me sometimes, can have paralysis by analysis. If I have a problem or a storm, sometimes I can roll it around in my head, write down pros and cons, come up with 3 solutions, and then analyze it all over again. Or as we talked about last week, I can worry about it – and get stuck. Some people in a storm can hunker down, close in, and feel fearful, and defeated.

Look at the disciples, when the storm hit, they may have tried other things as fisherman, they may have tried to steer the boat in a different direction, gotten the boat to shore. Maybe some of the disciples hunkered down, had paralysis by analysis. But they were certainly afraid. They say rudely to Jesus, “don't you care if we drown?”

But at least they go to him. They go in the right direction. They ask for help. They woke Jesus up. Sometimes when storms hit and we feel afraid, we may feel like Jesus is asleep. Doesn't he hear my prayers? Hello Jesus I'm drowning here!

So what happens next?

Jesus calms the storm. By doing so, he is showing who he really is.

One of our staff members said she has read this story many times to her young son. At the end the disciples say, “Who is this?” She says she tells her son, “We know who Jesus is, he's God. We can trust him.”

Jesus is revealing himself to his disciples as more than just a rabbi, more than just a man...Jesus is God. The disciples don't get it very quickly, and have some fear of Jesus. They ask “Who is this?” at the end of this story.

We would be wise to also have some awe, reverence, and wonder at seeing Jesus at work in our lives. May our faith increase and our fear decrease as we realize who Jesus is in our lives!

Now Jesus does something else. He calls the disciples out on fear and faith. “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Part of what makes the Bible attractive to me is the realness of the characters. They are believable. They are flawed. It would be easy to call them heroes and heroines, but they mess up a lot. Yet, Jesus still uses them.

Here are these young men who have been following Jesus, just saw him heal a man's hand, and heal others with evil spirit and disease in Mark 3, but they still have doubts and ask "Who is this guy?"

It reminds me of last Sunday, the worry Jesus talked about in Matthew.

Last we learned that we can use the ordinary in our lives, the ordinary brown house 2 doors down from the church, to become something for the Kingdom of God, such as the Jeremiah House. And God can move in us – in our normal lives – like he did in the normal lives of scared fisherman – to do extra-ordinary things for the kingdom.

Later in life, the disciple John wrote this about fear in 1 John 4:18 which says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

Instead of fear, we turn to faith.

So...we say, turn to Jesus, give him your fears, but how does that work?
It works when Jesus works through you.

Well, through our church deacons, we have ministry teams. One of these is the hospital team. It is made up of deacons and some others who are volunteers. They are all wonderful.

One of those volunteers is Steve. A couple of years ago, Steve was on call for that week to make visits. But he was sick and in the hospital himself. That week, not one, not two, but 3 people from ZPC visited him from the team.

Fast forward, to about a year ago, his wife had a doctor appointment for a procedure on her back around 11 am on a Thursday. She left the appointment and immediately started losing feeling in her legs, from some bleeding as a complication of the procedure. By 2 pm she was at the ER at St. V's hospital on 86th street. She was in surgery by 9 pm, and the doctor came out at 1:30 am to talk to Steve. The doctor said he had removed blood clots around her spine and done some other things, but wasn't sure she would regain feeling in her legs. Members of our hospital team visited Steve and his wife during her time in the ICU.

Within 18 hours, she was regaining feeling in her legs, spent 8 days in the hospital, and made a remarkable recovery, and is still getting better today.

Steve told me that even though he was already on the hospital team, he loves to make visits because it meant so much to him how you, our church family, visited him and prayed for him during his storms.

Fast forward to two months ago, late in December, when Steve was called to hospital in Carmel to visit a family, and arrived within one minute of someone's elderly parent dying. He prayed for them.

Within a couple of days, this person whose parent had just died, was hospitalized too. This time it was in downtown Indy at IU medical center.

It was over New Year's weekend. I walked in the lobby of IU med center to make a visit, and who do I see but Steve on his way out. He immediately gave me a report that he had a great visit and prayer and how this member of ZPC was doing. He had made the long drive down from north of Zionsville to downtown for a short visit and prayer and was now heading home on a cold winter day. I made my visit too, but Steve had beat me to it. He was already representing Jesus to this family.

A couple of years ago, during Steve's storm when he was hospitalized, Jesus was with him through 3 visits and prayers.

During the fear of his wife losing feeling in her legs, and being in the ICU, Jesus walked with Steve and his family through the prayers of the church and loved ones.

During other people's storms and fear, Steve has been there with brief hospital visits and prayer. When people ask where is Jesus, especially in storms or when I'm afraid, if we know Jesus, and we can sit with them, sometimes in silence, sometimes in prayer, sometimes with just a word, or with a laugh, we can be Jesus's hands and feet.

I appreciate that Jerry has been challenging to see how we can bring God's kingdom into our everyday lives, by looking at ways in our ordinary lives we can use our gifts, and even our brokenness to touch others. Steve, but not only Steve, others as well, are doing that through brief hospital visits and prayers.

But you don't have to be on the hospital team or a pastor to represent Jesus to others.

Last fall there were some Breaking Bread groups which met for dinner and fellowship. One breaking bread group decided to continue on, add some people and become a home group. Just a few weeks ago in January, one of their members was having surgery on a Monday. The group gathered in our chapel after worship on the Sunday before the surgery, circled up and prayed for that new friend. They are still getting to know each other, but didn't need a pastor or a deacon or a hospital team member to pray for them. They were being Jesus hands and feet for each other.

Storms happen in life – to all of us.

Fear focuses on what might happen to us or our loved ones in those storms.

Faith focuses on Jesus.

We can't control the future, but we can have faith.

We can't stop the storms, but we can have a healthy dependence on God, realizing our need for God.

If we live in faith, we can be with others in their time of fear.

Paul said, he had a thorn in his flesh and was weak.

But Jesus said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Paul says, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

May you depend on Jesus for his power in the storms and fears of your life this week. And may you be Jesus, in your weakness, but in Christ's power, to be there in their storms and in their fears.

Let's pray.

Help us to pray desperately, passionately to you.

And to live that way for you.

In life's storms, we can be afraid. Help us to trade fear for faith.

To trust in you. To turn to you.

Help us to turn to you Jesus – by your wounds we are healed, you can relate.

Help us to turn to you O God – and know that you are there for us. In Jesus name, Amen.