



WESTLAKE HILLS

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“With Jesus in the Storms of Life”

Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 4:35-41

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Mark 4:35-41 *(New International Version)*

Jesus Calms the Storm

³⁵That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Introduction.

There is nothing like a dangerous storm rolling in when you are out of doors to send fear through your bones! I remember a time when Lorie and I were hiking the Franconia Ridge in the White Mountains of New Hampshire many years ago. We underestimated the difficulty of the climb and the time it would take to complete the hike.

We were supposed to be up and over the summit of Mount Lincoln by the afternoon and make our way over Mount Lafayette to a shelter on the other side where we planned to spend the night. But the hike was much more difficult than we anticipated, and we were forced to camp just off the trail near the top of Mount Lincoln. Not a very good idea. Any of you who have spent much time in the mountains know you don't want to stay near the summit; that's where the danger lies.

I remember watching the sun set as a bad weather front started to roll in, and I knew we were in for a stormy night. And I am here to tell you that night my prayer life was taken to a whole new level! The wind whipped our little tent all through the night, and Lorie battled hypothermia. We made it through the storm, but it was a very frightening experience, and we made a commitment to do a better job in the future of studying the topographical maps of the hiking trails so we would know what we were getting ourselves into!

Storms can be treacherous, they can tear our worlds apart, and they have a way of taking us to our knees. Have you been through a rough storm in recent months? Are you in the midst of one right now? Chances are if your life is pretty calm now, it probably won't stay that way long, and a storm may be approaching sooner than you think.



The storms of life aren't just caused by weather. Just ask the people of Haiti. The earthquake which has devastated their country has created a crisis as great as any tsunami or any hurricane could ever cause. We would do well to study this passage and learn how to cope when the storms of life hit.

I. The Storms of Life.

After a long day of teaching, Jesus told His disciples He wanted to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to the eastern shore. Tired and exhausted from the exacting demands of the day, they set sail on the water, and Jesus was in the stern of the boat and fell asleep upon a pillow. Suddenly, a violent storm developed, and waves began to crash against the boat, splashing over the sides, so that the vessel was nearly swamped.

The geographic location of the Sea of Galilee makes it particularly susceptible to sudden and violent storms like this. The Sea of Galilee, which is really more like a very large lake than a sea, is situated in a basin that is surrounded by mountains. One New Testament scholar has written the about the susceptibility of the Sea of Galilee to storms: "The atmosphere for the most part hangs still and heavy, but the cold currents, as they pass from the west, are sucked down into vortices of air, or by the narrow gorges that break upon the lake. Then arise the sudden storms for which the region is notorious."ⁱ

I take comfort in the fact that Jesus and His disciples encountered storms in life, just like you and I do, and the fact that Jesus was with them didn't protect the disciples from having to face the storm that came their way. You and I can do all the right things, we can even follow the commands of God and do exactly what He tells us, and it will not prevent us from having to deal with storms at some point in our lives.

Being a follower of Jesus doesn't make us exempt from pain, suffering, or even death itself, and being a disciple doesn't give us a "get out of jail free" card which protects us from the tough things in life. Someone once said, "God only had one Son without sin, but never did He have a child without suffering." Jesus and His disciples encountered storms in life, just like the rest of us.

Some of the storms that come our way are total surprises. They come out of the blue and erupt into our lives without any warning, like the earthquake in Haiti. Other storms build on the horizon for a while; we see them growing, and we can watch their approach.

I remember being at a house on Lake LBJ several years ago. As the sun set, I sat on the back covered patio and watched a storm build for about a half hour. Dark clouds developed, lightning flashed across the sky, the front moved in toward me, and I could see the rain pouring down on the water before it hit the house with full force. There are storms in life like that. We see them coming; we know they are just around the corner.

Some storms we create ourselves. We're the cause of the dark weather pattern that surrounds us, and the storm we face is a storm we created. We make bad decisions, we deliberately choose to go against what we know is the right thing to do, and we suffer the consequences of our own poor choices and willful disobedience. Some storms we can't blame on anything or anyone else. All we have to do is take a long look in the mirror to discover the cause.

II. The Apparent Indifference of God.

Jesus had given orders to His disciples to go over to the other side of the lake, the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and together they had gotten in a boat to travel there. Tired and exhausted from the exacting tasks of the day - teaching and healing, Jesus was in the stern of the boat, and He fell asleep on a pillow. When the storm erupted, Jesus remained asleep in the back of the boat. The



disciples became so alarmed by the situation they woke Him and cried out, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?!" (Mk. 4:38).

There are times in life when it feels like God doesn't care, like He's fallen asleep and is indifferent to the problems we're facing. Our prayers feel like they bounce off the ceiling. Our efforts to cry out to God seem to go unnoticed. It feels like God is a million miles away. Ever felt like that? The disciples sure did, and so have I.

We should never assume God doesn't care or that He is indifferent to your concerns. He is our heavenly Father, and what concerns us concerns Him. Nothing will ever touch you that doesn't have to pass through the permissive hand of a loving Father, and the Bible assures us that, as the old hymn says, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me." Jesus was with the disciples in the midst of their storm, and He will be with you and me whenever we have to pass through troubled waters, too.

III. The Command of Jesus.

The disciples were afraid. They were experienced fishermen, but this storm was nasty enough to scare them to death. The text tells us that when the disciples cried out to Jesus, our Lord got up, and He rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "*Quiet! Be still!*" Some translations render the command, "*Peace! Be still!*" Then the wind died down, and the sea was completely calm.

That is a great word we all need to hear. In the midst of our fear, in the midst of whatever storm we may find ourselves in, all of us could benefit from hearing our Lord's clear words, "Peace! Be still!" They were words Jesus not only spoke to the wind and the waves. I think they are words He speaks to us as well today.

I am struck by the fact that Jesus was asleep in the boat in the midst of the storm. The violence of the wind and the turbulence of the waves did not disturb him, and He was fast asleep in the back of the boat. Was it because He was so exhausted by the work of the day? Maybe. But could it be that Jesus so trusted His heavenly Father He was at rest and at peace no matter what happened around Him, even when a storm came?

Last summer, Lorie and I visited a woman named Rachel Johnson and her husband Bill in Anacortes north of Seattle. They have a ministry of hospitality and healing for ministry-types and others like us who need a safe harbor in the storms of life. They opened their beautiful home to us on the Puget Sound and provided a place of peace and rest unlike anything we've experienced in a long time. Last year they hosted over 250 people in their home coming and going.

Rachel is a woman who has an unshakable trust in God, and she lives with great peace despite the many storms she's had to go through. Her father died at an early age, and she cared for her mother who battled ill health for a long time and had her move in with them in her latter years until she died. Rachel's husband Bill has had Parkinson's disease for the last 20 years, and she is the primary caregiver for him as he battles this debilitating illness. Her daughter Shannon dealt with an autoimmune disorder when she was in her 20s, and now they think their grown son, who is in his 40s, may have ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. Talk about a woman who's had to face a lot of storms.

Despite all these trials, Rachel has an unshakable trust in the goodness of the Father, and she is unswerving in her confidence in the loving purposes of God. Lorie and I found such great comfort talking to Rachel about the storms of our lives and how she has found peace in the midst of it all. I read the following many years ago, and it has stayed with me: "Sometimes God calms the storm -- and sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms his child." Rachel is an example of this.

Last week, the senior staff met to discuss the budget shortfall we are facing as a church for 2010. While the congregation has been incredibly generous and many of you have been sacrificial in your



pledge, not everyone has pledged and we have not fully subscribed the budget as yet. In the next couple of weeks, the Budget Committee and Session will begin consideration of what steps we will need to take to reduce spending, including reductions in our mission support and possibly personnel, in order to have a balanced budget. It was obvious to the senior staff when we were talking about these things that I was pretty worked up about the situation. In the midst of one of my more animated moments, Emily Craven said to me, "You know, I think the word Jesus spoke in the passage on which you are to preach this Sunday is the word you need to hear: 'Peace! Be still!'" She was right. It was a word I needed to hear.

IV, The Response of the Disciples.

After Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and everything became calm, the disciples responded by saying, "*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him? (Mk. 4:41)*". They began to see all the more clearly that Jesus was no ordinary person. He had the power to teach and the power to heal and the power to overcome evil, but, as they discovered on their journey across the Sea of Galilee, He also had power over the elements of creation itself. "Is there anything He can't do?" the disciples' wondered. Just when they thought they had Jesus figured out, He broke out of their categories all over again.

Whenever we try to put Jesus in a box, He will always break out of it. You can walk with Him for a lifetime, and He'll still surprise you. Our Lord invites us to join Him on an adventure of faith. And one thing is for sure, it will never get old and it will never be predictable. So quit trying to put Jesus in a box. He will not let you, and there is more about the Lord you have yet to discover.

Conclusion.

Lorie and I went to seminary with Mike Ford, who was President Gerald Ford's son, while the President was in office. Mike always had two secret service agents with him wherever he went – to class, to the gym, to the library. They were his constant companions.

In May of Mike's middler year, he took a wilderness course which included a week-long trip to the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. The goal was for the members of the class to explore Christian community and values clarification, and decision-making was done as a group. During the trip, a freak snow storm hit the Adirondack Mountains, and they were snowed in. When they woke up one morning, they were covered in 2 feet of snow.

After spending a couple of hours trying to figure out what to do, they realized they were in real trouble. So they turned to the secret service agents and asked, "Can you do anything to help?" The agents replied, "We didn't want to get in the way of your group process, but sure, we can help." One agent pulled out a shortwave radio from his backpack, and called for a helicopter to come and airlift the whole class out. Another shot flares in the air to signal where they were. The group was airlifted to safety, and every member of the class had a great story to tell their grandchildren one day.

When a storm comes your way, it's nice to know someone in high places you can call on when nothing else and no one else can rescue you. The disciples found this to be true as well. Jesus is there, and He will bring the power of His presence and peace to rescue you.

This passage of Scripture is an invitation for us to trust God not only in the times when things are good and going well, but also in the times when we are in the midst of the worst storms we ever have to face in life.

What storm in your life are you dealing with this morning? Where is the turbulent water and blowing wind that threatens your life? In what ways does it feel like Jesus has fallen asleep in your boat, and you wonder why He isn't doing anything about it? Call out to Jesus and ask Him to save you



in your time of distress. Learn to trust Him by faith, even in the storm. This passage doesn't promise that our Lord will always take away the storm. Sometimes He does, and other times He doesn't. But it does mean He will always be with us in the midst of it all, and His calming presence can make all the difference. Remember, "Sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes He calms His child."

Amy Carmichael was a missionary from Ireland to India, and her ministry spanned 55 years during which time she never took a furlough. Despite suffering neuralgia, a disease of the nerves that made her whole body weak and achy and put her in bed for weeks at a time, she ministered tirelessly to young women who were forced into prostitution in the Hindu temples. Of this passage Amy wrote the following poem. As we close, may it speak to each of our hearts.

Thou art the Lord who slept upon the pillow,
Thou art the Lord who soothed the furious sea,
What matter beating wind and tossing billow
If only we are in the boat with Thee?

Hold us in quiet through the age-long minute
While Thou art silent, and the wind is shrill:
Can the boat sink while Thou, dear Lord, art in it?
Can the heart faint that waiteth on Thy will?ⁱⁱ

May we look to Jesus in the storms of our lives. He is in the boat with us, and He is our only hope and salvation. Amen.

ⁱ G.A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 1909.

ⁱⁱ Amy Carmichael, cited by Elizabeth Eliot in *Keep a Quiet Heart*, p16.

