GETTING TO THE OTHER SIDE

Mark 4:35-41

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The only one who should have been afraid in today’s story, is Jesus. Here, he puts his life and his trust into these fishermen’s hands, (his disciples), and falls asleep in the back of the boat - trusting them to get him to the other side; through the sea. But instead, when the boat was being swamped, they wake him up; and he isn’t afraid, but immediately he shows them he cares for them, and desires to save them. Reminds me of a good Father, who, even if they are afraid or upset, they usually step into the dire situation immediately to alleviate any anxiety – always more concerned about the safety of others than themselves. That is what Father’s do!

Today is Father’s Day, so we are remembering our father’s. Those men in our lives who led and guided us to become independent adults. Most Father’s know better than to just take charge of every situation and fix it themselves. Instead, dads teach their kids how to navigate a boat. Just one chapter earlier, Jesus commissioned the disciples, he gave them the power to cast out demons. Today, in the boat, Jesus knows they’ve been given this power; power to rebuke the wind and the waves and calm the seas – they just don’t have the faith in themselves - that they can do it for themselves. The disciples, commissioned by the Son of God to even cast out demons, cannot, or will not rebuke the wind and the waves of the sea. (Did you notice they don't even try?) They're too busy calming themselves, thinking; “it’s okay, Jesus is in the back of the boat. He'll save us." “Dad’s here – let’s ask him to do it for us!” Often Dad’s know, and Jesus knew they had what it takes - but they are still afraid. Sounds like a lot of parent/child relationships.

Jesus didn’t call his disciples to merely follow him. He called them and us to lead, to heal, to proclaim, and to cast out. He asks them to have faith in the power that he promised, and the work he commissions them to do, for the Kingdom of God.

So, as you listen to Mark’s report of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, accordingly; when do you suppose the disciples were most afraid? As the storm raged and the hurricane-force winds filled their boat with water? Or when Jesus calmed the storm and set everything at peace? The answer is counterintuitive. It was the latter. Like an authoritative Father who claps his hands twice to silence a noisy room full of kids; Jesus spoke two words and the storm obeyed. He didn’t even have to yell. Actually, for the disciples; (and a lot of kids) that’s was when things really got scary. Upon seeing Jesus exercise absolute control over God’s creation, New International version in Mark tells us the disciples “were terrified!”

This text invites us to reflect on the things which cause us to be afraid. Those times when we forget that we too are commissioned by God to cast out demons and heal the sick. Those things that make us want to call dad - because dad always come through for us before! Whether it is spiders or snakes not wanting to climb up that ladder because we are afraid of heights. “But dad why don’t you write the application for me or say the prayer – because you do it so much better than I do – I hate public speaking!” But the problem may be that we’re afraid of the wrong things. Think about it; what scares you the most?

Now granted, had it been me out on that boat that night, I probably would have been afraid too. So, yes, the disciples’ fear on the lake that night was entirely legitimate. I mean, have you ever been out on a lake at night, with no power, no motor, no lights, no radio - no moon or stars – and then all of a sudden there were hurricane-strength winds crashing waves into the boat and filling it with water? Well; do I have a story for you! Ha! Last spring my friend Pam needed help putting her pontoon in the water for the season. I offered – and I found a friend with a truck – and by the time we got out there, it was late afternoon, and we got the pontoon in the water just fine, and the motor turned over just fine. All systems (seemed to be) go! So, he pushed me away from the dock – and let go of the rope. All I had to do is “get to the other side” where her slip was – where she docks her boat when it is unused. And, although the engine turned over – the propellers, the gears were not working. And I was gradually floating further and further away from the dock in the direction of the damn. Clouds formed and the wind came up and I hollered for my friend to call for help! But of course, there was no cell service. I began to pray. I envisioned myself underneath the tarp curled up on the passenger seat, all night – freezing. All I wanted to do – was get to the other side where I could dock her boat, which now seemed impossible without a functioning transmission. All I could do is reach out to my Father in heaven – and pray.

If there is ever a time for fear, this would be it. But in the disciple’s case; Jesus rebukes them. “Why are you so afraid?” He asked. Then he asks that stinging question, “Have you still no faith?” Yes, financial trouble is scary. Family problems are scary. All of these are legitimately scary. But there is something much more worthy of fear than these. Standing face to face with the God who made the universe, the God who knows all things, who has power over all things, who rebukes hurricanes like an authoritarian father – well, in the end, that is the only true reason for being afraid. Encounters with this God in the Scriptures Old and New; Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul were rightly terrified! And remember Job? His time with God in the Old Testament reading is a great example of a God to be feared.

But, I am reminded of the disciples’ question in verse 38. “Do you not care that we are perishing?” “Do you not care whether we get to the other side?” His answer, was in his actions, in the fact that he rebuked the storm immediately. Of course, He cared. The only one who is truly worthy of fear in today’s story, shows that He truly cares for His disciples and desires to save them. Not only them, but all who are perishing.

Today is Father’s Day. You can be certain there are fathers in out congregation, who are suffer fears. They are afraid they are failing. They are afraid of being unable to provide enough. They are afraid they have neglected their children one too many times. They are afraid they will look back on life and be overcome with regret. Some of these fears are legitimate.

In December of 1989, I packed our belongings and moved from our parsonage in Valier Montana to my new appointment in Cedar Rapids Iowa. I and my 7-year-old twin sons were in, (not a boat) but in my blazer; and all of our belongings on the Mayflower van. Long story short – we made it as far as Sheridan Wy. before the road conditions became perilous. The wind was blowing the snow across I-90, and the right lane was completely snow packed, and I couldn’t see the car tail lights right in front of us. Inching along in the left lane, driving about 20 mph – the next thing I knew, there were 2 parked 18 wheelers, one in each lane – and all I could do is hit the brakes and slide into the back corner of one of these semis. The passenger window shattered, throwing glass into the Blazer – and we ultimately stopped in the ditch. I checked the kids. Clint had a small piece of glass in his lip, and Cody was okay. I got out and circled the car, checking the frame, and the best I could tell the frame was okay, and drivable. All I could think about was the next car who would not be able to see me in front of them. We inched our way in-between these two semis and got in front of one of them. I stuffed a sleeping bag in the open window and got out and started talking to the truckers and formulating a plan. It took us all afternoon to drive those 30 miles to Buffalo where we found a motel, and called my brother (on the land line) who worked at McKee Ford in RC – and he said he would drive up the next day and get the boys and follow me safely back to RC.. Did you catch it was December? And it was -20 below zero? My brother put my 7-year-old twin sons in the Jeep Cherokee, with him, and gave me a pair of man’s gloves – and Paul suggested that I call my dad in RC to see if I could stay at his house. We found a telephone booth (remember it is 20 below) and I stood there outside in the cold and called my dad asking if I and the boys could stay the night. His response was “I don’t know – I will have to ask Carol.” Not his proudest moment.” When I talked to my pastor and mentor friend Kent Millard about this later; he wisely reminded me that; “people will let you down – but your Father in heaven never will.”

But the point of my stories this morning is, that I am here to tell them. With God’s help (which came through a man named Pat at Sheridan Lake who brought a rope on his little boat and towed me to the other side – and my brother Paul – and sometimes it was Glen or Alan or Kent or Jim…..another “Father figure” that my Father God provided) we survived and made it to the other side where I was able to continue to do God’s work.

Sometimes it feels like humans do not care if we get to the other side. But we are reminded today to not fear the wrong things. Sure, there are plenty of situations in this world that trigger fear; and cause us to seek earthly/human help. But Jesus was trying to teach his disciples where their true help comes. They needed to look to their father first – not him. The miracle is not that Jesus calmed the storm – it is that he was in the boat with the disciples. He was with them. God with us. I often hear “why doesn’t God intervene” – take care of all that is wrong in the world? God’s power isn’t in being in control, it is in being in covenant with his people.

With God all things are possible! God always gets us to the other side! The energy we expended worrying and being afraid is wasted energy! The only one in which we truly should fear - is willing and able to save us from perishing. He showed it to his disciples in this text and each one of us has our own stories of how God our Father has gotten us to the other side. God cares for us and will save us.

This good news provides us with a firm foundation from which to address all that makes us afraid. God our Father, always has and always will have the ability to inspire men to do great things! I am sure all of you men/ Father’s - have your stories of how you felt led by God and the Holy Spirit to assist someone in distress. You were the one who God used that day to help someone get to the other side.

What do we do when the boat is being swamped? Perhaps our hymn today, written by Fosdick’s can help: “God of grace and God of glory”; “Lo, the hosts of evil round us, scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways! From the fears that long have bound us, free our hearts to faith and praise. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, for the living of these days.”

God the Father is always with us getting us to the other side. F.A.T.H.E.R.S stands for: "**F**aithful. "**A**lways there. "**T**rustworthy. "**H**onoring. "**E**ver-loving. "**R**ighteous. "**S**upportive. This is how our heavenly father is toward us and Jesus commissioned all of us to be this for others.

Let us pray: Lord, the only way that we can describe you is to use big words that have strong meaning. Struggle as we may, we can never hope to know the limits of your power, your mercy, your strength, your wisdom and your love. We have been told that even when a sparrow falls you know and we know that when we hurt, you know. We know that you know about the flowers and rivers and birds and all of nature. Convince us that you are big enough to protect the weakest and most helpless among us, big enough to forgive and that you are by our side, with us, never far away nor without hope and you will help us get to the other side of any and all personal and worldly concerns. God today we take time out to thank you for the special men in our lives. Dads and others, who gave us insight and courage and taught us things that we needed to know in order to grow in wisdom and love. We thank you for those who stepped in and represented God to us in their own way. We ask that you be with people hurting today, those who are suffering and wandering feeling helpless and hopeless without a rope to tow them to the other side. Let them know you are walking with them too. We pray this in Jesus’ name who taught us to pray:

Invocation: Today is a day like none other. Help us oh Lord to hear your word and to trust that you are bigger than any problem we might face. Give us your courage. Your people need us. A broken world needs us. The Church needs us to give another generation a reason to have faith in you. If we do not feel up lifted, we pray for your strength. If fear ties our tongue, loosen it with a message of mercy, grace, and love. God, may you deal with and heal the hurt and pain of specific people. Tomorrow will be another day like no other, may we be up to any and all tasks at hand. We worship and praise you for this hour of renewal, for we your people deserve nothing less.

Benediction: God’s promises endure from generation to generation. May God our Father bless all of you Fathers today and multiply all of our endeavors with his gracious favor.