

Out on the sea with Jesus/ Mark 4:35-31/ March 22, 2020

The bible story that we just read together,
about Jesus and his disciples and a boat and a storm,
likely sounds pretty familiar to any of our kids who are watching right now.
It's the story that Marcia Carothers and I told together in our first-ever
Church School at-home video
that we sent out to the kids yesterday.

Doing church entirely online is definitely an adventure for pastors.
(I do realize that every teacher out there is now rolling their eyes
and saying "tell me about it.")

But a lot of us clergy, you have to understand, are pretty old-school,
so this has been a steep learning curve.

My Facebook feed this week was full of posts from clergy friends asking each
other questions like "what is Zoom and can I do my Bible study on it?"
and "can I use my phone to do Facebook Live on Sunday? how do you do
that?"

Marcia and I puzzled over it and decided to post a video for our Church
School kids.

We set up our studio in an empty Church School classroom.

Our props were a Noah's Ark toy,

and a fan to create a windstorm on the Sea of Galilee,

and a whole bunch of those Fisher Price little plastic people playing the roles
of the disciples.

For some reason, we had the Fisher Price Superhero collection,
so Jesus was portrayed by Superman, appropriately enough.

Our filming was not without its challenges.

On take #3, my phone mysteriously switched to slow-motion right when we
turned on the fan -

the clip of me and Marcia's hair flying straight up in slo-mo is for sure going in the outtakes reel.

On takes 4, 5 and 6, I kept knocking the disciples off the boat, which was definitely *not* part of the Bible story.

The final version still has Wonder Woman getting tossed into the Sea of Galilee - I was just too tired to re-shoot at that point.

At the end of the video, I told the kids watching the same thing I say to you right now — that this a favorite story of mine.

And not just a favorite of *mine*, but of many —

And I would venture to guess that it's a story that will be told from many a pulpit

this week and in weeks to come.

Because it's the right story for right now.

To recap — without the benefit of little plastic people to demonstrate with — Jesus and his disciples set off one day to go from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other.

They'd been preaching about the love of God for a long time in that one place; so now it was time to take the story to others.

And, far from shore,

a storm blows up out of nowhere,

and the boat, it says, was in danger of going down,

and all the disciples were terrified, rightly so.

And in the midst of their very justified freak-out

they notice that Jesus, astonishingly, is sound asleep.

Hey, he was human. He was tired.

So friends shake him awake,

and, in their terror, they're angry at him.

Don't you care? they say, *don't you care?*

we could drown, Jesus!

And Jesus does this:

He says “Peace, be still” to the wind and the waves — and the storm stops.
And to his friends he says “why are you so afraid? Show a little faith.”

He calms the waters ... and he calms his friends.

This has been a treasured scripture story for generations,
for hundreds of years.

Hymns have been written about it, great paintings have been created about
it ...

Jesus and the stilling of the storm.

It is a *beloved* story.

And that’s because it’s a story that reminds people - reminds us -
that no matter how rough it gets,
no matter how frightened we might be,
we are not ever alone on the stormy seas,
not a one of us is ever alone.

And isn’t that the heart of our faith?

That there is someone in the same boat with us,
someone who chose to be in the same boat with us,
not watching from the shore, but out in the waves with us.

No matter what we face, this friend is with us,
no matter the strength of our fear, this Savior is with us.

And when we cry out, “hey, do you care?”

the answer is always “Yes. Yes. Why are you afraid?
I’m here.”

A long while back we had a speaker come to our youth group,
a woman named Catherine Ho, from China.

I’ll never forget her.

Baptized as a Christian in China in 1950,

she was arrested for the first time in 1955 because of her religion,
and then arrested again in 1959 –
and spent the next twenty years of her life in labor camps and jails,
steadfastly refusing to deny her faith.

She was worked mercilessly, starved frequently.

And it was all just for being a Christian,
for simply believing in Christ.

And Catherine had this calm, sweet little voice,
she just exuded serenity.

And when she paused to ask questions,
one of the teenagers asked her what probably a lot of us were thinking
“Did you ever think about just pretending you weren’t a Christian
anymore?” they asked.

“Oh, no,” said Catherine, “I couldn’t ever do that.”

“So then,” said the teen, “weren’t you, like, *afraid*, all the time? Of what
might happen to you?”

“Sometimes I was afraid,” Catherine said.

“But then I would remember.

I would remember who was out on the stormy sea with me.

I would remember that **He** was on the stormy sea with me.

And then — then I wasn’t afraid.”

That’s always stuck with me.

To me, honestly, the miracle of this scripture story
isn’t that Jesus made the winds go away.

It’s that he made the *fear* go away.

Making his friends’ fear go away was all that really mattered to him.

And taking away **our** fears is all that matters to him now.

Listen, this is a crazy weird time.

We are in a moment when everything feels at sea,
and the deck is moving beneath our feet,
and things are a little unsteady.
And it's perfectly reasonable to feel a little shaken - or a lot -
and a little scared - or a lot.

But here's what we need to **not** forget:

The guy in the back of the boat.

We need **to remember** who's traveling with us,
who's in this storm with us.

We need to remember that we're in the company of the One who has the
power to calm *our* storms.

Taking away the fear that his friends were feeling out there on the Sea of
Galilee — that was all that mattered to Jesus then.

Taking away **our** fear,
that's all that matters to him now.

And you know, he's up to the task.

I am here, he says, I am with you.

Do not fear.

I am your peace.

The boat will not founder,
nor will the storm last forever.

Be not afraid.

Amen.