

What is it about storms that can be scary? Is it the loud thunder or the crack of lightning? Maybe the downpour of rain is so furious that the windshield wipers can't keep up. I've thought about the many weather storms I've endured, and one, in particular, comes to mind. It was the winter of 2007, and I took our high school ministry to Hume Lake Winter Camp. We had made the last stop for gas before going up the treacherous hill to Hume. We were supposed to have clear weather all the way there, but as we pulled out of the gas station, it started to snow! I thought, "Uh-oh, we are in for it if it's snowing at this low level." We pulled over, chained up the three vans, and continued our journey up the hill.

As we were going up the hill, an ambulance came down, skidded out of control, crossed our traffic lane, and landed in a ditch. The two-lane road was closed at that moment until they got the ambulance out of the ditch. Two hours later, we continued our journey up the hill in some of the worst snow drifts and road conditions I had ever driven. At one point, I couldn't see two feet in front of me. Fear gripped me. I pulled over and talked to our other drivers, who, by the way, this was their first time driving in the snow, to consider turning around and going home. All I could see flashing through my mind was the headline "Stupid youth pastor leads the way as three church vans skid off the cliff in a treacherous snowstorm. All 51 passengers died."

As I discussed the dilemma with our other drivers in the falling snow and wind, we decided it would be more dangerous to go back down the hill. Good 'Ol Will Mitchell chimed in, "Hey, God is in control. We are supposed to be at this camp; his hand is on us!" It was almost as if it was Jesus saying to me, "Sandy, where is your faith?"

Jesus asks us two questions in Mark 4:35-41. The questions probe our hopes and fears. We may have to linger with the questions and dig deep to answer them honestly. If we do so, Jesus will help us build a faith that can weather the storms of life.

So far, in the first four chapters of Mark, we have heard a lot about the "Kingdom of Heaven." In his sermon last week, Kevin said, "Mark's thesis is that the Kingdom of Heaven is here." He said we don't get much explanation about the "Kingdom of Heaven" except through stories: Religious leaders were confronted, and people were encountering Jesus, and walking away changed. As we've seen the last couple of Sundays, Jesus described what the Kingdom of Heaven is like through parables, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

One of the things we will learn through the Gospel of Mark is that Jesus will teach and then put those teachings into action. We will also see that Jesus never just answers a question. He answers a question with a question. So in the passage today, it's time for the disciples to practice what they learned.

**That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him! Mark 4:35-41.**

It's the end of the day, Jesus has been teaching on the western shores of Galilee, and he decides it's time to go to the other side of the lake. The Sea of Galilee isn't a vast lake. Mountainous areas surround it. It's about seven to eight miles across and 13 miles long. It's also 700 feet below sea level. Compare it with Lake Tahoe, and you would find Lake Tahoe about 30 times larger than the Sea of Galilee. So when Jesus asks them to head over to the other side of the lake, it should have been about a two-hour trip.

The other side of the lake is “Gentile” territory. Jesus invites the disciples to go to the other side. What awaits them at the other side of the lake is for next week! Mark tells us they left the crowd and started the journey across the lake with other boats following.

The Sea of Galilee is known for its unpredictable weather and chaotic storms due to the cold mountain air colliding with the warm sea air. While traveling, a furious squall hits the lake and puts the lives of the disciples and Jesus in danger. N.T. Wright tells us:

**...apart from fishermen, the Jews were not a seafaring people. The sea came to symbolize, for them, the dark power of evil, threatening to destroy God’s good creation, God’s people, God’s purposes.**

But Mark’s readers would also have had several other storms in mind when they read his account. One such storm would be the account of Jonah. Instead of doing what God told him, he sailed away in the opposite direction. A huge storm ensued, which only calmed down when the sailors tossed Jonah overboard. Mark’s readers would also go back to the beginning, to creation, when we hear of God’s new world coming forth from the dark sea.

So as the storm rages, fear sets in for the disciples. Their lives are in danger, and the Kingdom of God is in danger! Jesus spent the day teaching about the Kingdom of God, and the king of the kingdom is about to go under. The mission is about to go under. I love how Mark contrasts the disciples’ and Jesus’ reactions. What is Jesus doing? He’s sleeping soundly—in the middle of a squall! Now granted, he preached all day. He’s tired! After I’m done preaching, I will also take a nap and could probably sleep through a storm!

We might say we see Jesus’ humanity here. But I think it’s something different. The waves are breaking over the boat, and the disciples are freaking out, including the experienced fishermen, thinking they will die! A very different reaction than Jesus. Two different responses: confidence and fear. In the disciples’ fear, they run to wake up Jesus and, in their fear, ask Him a question. “Don’t you care if we drown?”

I’ve often pondered this question. Many of these men were experienced fishermen. They have had to endure many storms on this lake. What was it about this storm that was different? What about this storm brought them to their knees, fearing for their life?

I thought back to my own story about driving to Hume Lake. Like the disciples, I had driven that crazy

Hume Lake road a hundred times. I’ve been driving in the snow since I was sixteen. But this snowstorm was different, and I think this storm on the lake was different. “Don’t you care if we drown?” To the disciples, Jesus seems indifferent to their situation. He is sleeping soundly in the hull of the boat. Think of the storms you have lived through. Haven’t we all said that to Jesus at some point in our lives? “Jesus, where are you? Don’t you care?” I know I’ve asked the same question!

As Jesus wakes up, he does something unfathomable in the disciple’s mind—he stills the storm. He speaks the Word, and the wind and the waves obey. The disciples had seen Jesus heal people and cast out demons, but this, command over the wind and the waves?

Jesus faces his disciples and asks them two questions. Why are you so afraid? And, do you still have no faith? In typical Jesus fashion, he teaches to the crowds and then illustrates with his actions. In typical Jesus fashion, the disciples ask him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, questions that cut to the core.

If we look at the first question, it’s a pretty simple answer; the disciples were afraid they would die! But look at the second question. “Do you still have no faith?” If the disciples did have faith, they would respond differently. Go back to the parables Jesus taught earlier in the day. In the parable of the sower, we learn some will fall away because of tough times and persecution. The storm comes; will the disciples fall away? The parable of the mustard seed is about the Kingdom that Jesus is advancing. Will it grow? Or will it drown in the sea? Do you still have no faith?

How do we define faith? Many of us would define faith right out of Hebrews 11:1 *“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* Up to this point, the disciples had no problem following Jesus, even into Gentile territory, but when it looked like their boat was going to sink and they were going to die, where was their faith?

See, what the disciples didn’t understand is that faith, defined by what we can study and read in the Gospel of Mark, is, as Scott Grant PBC Teaching Pastor would say, “believing that the kingdom of God is breaking into this world in the person of Jesus.” Up to this point, everything the disciples have seen, learned, and experienced with Jesus should have given them the trust and the confidence to believe and act in faith instead of fear. When they woke Jesus up, I don’t think they believed Jesus could do anything about the storm, yet

they were terrified when Jesus stilled the storm. If the storm evoked fear in the disciples and brought them to their knees, Jesus stilling the storm left them with the question of who they should fear more—nature or Jesus?

We, too, are invited to follow Jesus. He invites us “to go over to the other side.” He invites us into “Gentile” territory. He asks us the same question, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Through these questions, Jesus will help us build a faith that can weather the storms of life. Like the disciples, we need to remember a few things.

**Following Jesus does not mean storms will never come.**

I often see believers in Christ blindsided when hard things happen in life. It’s the attitude of “now I know Jesus, so my life will be easy.” What is the way of Jesus? Service and suffering. All through the scriptures, we see those who have put their faith in Jesus suffer. We shouldn’t be surprised when storms enter our lives.

**1 Peter 4:16 - However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.**

**Romans 5:3-5 - Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.**

**James 1:3-6 - because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.**

Storms produce fear in our lives. It’s the fear of the unknown. Jesus asks, “why are you afraid?” Let that sink in for a moment. “Why are you afraid?” Are you afraid of failure? Rejection? Not measuring up? Loss? When we answer honestly, it allows Jesus to address our fears.

**Jesus calls us to have faith in the midst of the storm.**

As followers of Jesus, we have some kind of faith. But do we have the kind of faith that weathers the storms of life? Do we have the kind of faith that ultimately trusts in the one who gives us hope and promises? Storms in our lives have a way of breaking that box we often put Jesus in to drive us to our knees and bring us closer to him to deepen our faith, to refine our faith and lead us into a different kind of unknown.

What have you experienced with Jesus? Jesus wants to connect with you on a deeper level than you will ever know. The question, “Do you still have no faith?” can cut to the core of who we are. What do we put our faith in? What in your world is more trustworthy than Jesus?

**Jesus is Lord over the storm.**

In this story, Jesus is showing us his authority. He has the power to heal, cast out demons, and has the power to command the wind and the waves and whatever evil was meant to sink that boat and the Kingdom of God. Jesus has the same power in our lives. If you are here this morning being jostled around by the storms, remember, Jesus is Lord over the storm. He is in it with you; he wants you to cry out to him, and he wants to deepen your faith. We do not need to fear the storm when our faith is anchored in Jesus. He is Lord over the storm.

When I think of that weekend at Hume Lake, it was one of the most powerful weekends in the lives of our students. If I had turned that caravan of church vans around during that awful snowstorm, if I had given into my fears of us sliding off the cliffs into the deep ravine, I would have let the enemy win that night. So many of our students came to know the Lord who is over the storm—Jesus. And as I think about that weekend, Jesus used it as a catalyst to change the course of so many lives and to expand the kingdom. So many students from that trip are now adults serving, expanding, and bringing the Kingdom of God near, not letting their fear get in the way, but they have trusted Jesus to build a faith that can weather the storms of life.

At the end of this story, we see that the disciples move from fear to terror. They ask a question amongst themselves, “Who is this?” Historically, they knew only God could calm the storm. I mentioned Jonah earlier but look at Psalm 107.

**Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord,**

his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. Psalm 107:23-30.

I'm sure some of the disciples were thinking about this Psalm. How could they not! I love what Jo Saxton says.

They've been given, in the midst of their storm, a fresh revelation of the goodness and the greatness of God: that he rescues lives, that he transforms lives, that he was with them in the storm, he can rebuke the storm, and he can meet them right where they are at without condemnation.

We can forget about God's goodness and greatness in the middle of the storms in our lives. We can forget he is right there in the middle of it with us. We can forget he is Lord over the storm and that he asks us to have faith in the midst of the storm. Don't forget that Jesus will help us build a faith that can weather the storms of life. It's the kind of faith that is willing to go to the other side of the lake, the unfamiliar territory, to bring near the Kingdom of Heaven.