

TUMC SERMON – June 21, 2015 – Why are you afraid?

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Scriptures: Mark 4:35-41
Psalm 34: 8, 10 & 14

[Acknowledge presence of the kids and invite them to listen. If there is a kid close to you, say hi and make sure they know they are welcome.]

There are a few things I know about kids will be very helpful as we enter this story today:

- 1) You are usually honest about what makes you afraid (adults try to cover up).
- 2) Kids like to ask questions (so do scientists and theologians, actually).
- 3) Kids usually have very active imaginations, sometimes better than the adults.

Sometimes when we come to a story we know really well, using our imaginations is one of the ways we can help figure out what is going on in a Bible story, or to hear what God might be saying to us in the story.

That is my invitation to you; we are going to let our imaginations tell us what the story has for us this morning.

But before we get started with imagination part (where I give you some direction), let me tell you a little of what was going on before this part of the story happened.

This boat story is all part of Jesus' life story from the point of view of a writer called Mark. Mark tells us a lot of things about how it was back in Bible times when Jesus was teaching people face to face. His followers called him Teacher. *[Raise your hands if you have a teacher.]*

What did Jesus teach?

Jesus taught people that they didn't need to be stuck with the wrong things they had done in their lives, that God forgives anyone who wants to start over and God helps them to live right. This was good news, because people feel like they've done a lot of wrong things.

Jesus also taught people that there was something called the realm of God (or the kingdom of God), he told all kinds of stories about it and said that it was kind of tricky. Because some people have a hard time figuring out what that was, and that if they paid close attention they would see it and hear it.

He told them that some people would be able to see God at work in the world, and others wouldn't. He said that you had to have eyes to see, you had to pay attention to see God at work.

One thing we learn about Jesus in the Bible is that he had compassion. *[See if a kid can tell us what it means.]* He cared so much about people, and he used his power to heal some of them from all kinds of physical and spiritual sicknesses. A lot of people followed him because of that, because they wanted to be healed.

Well, what happened just before the story of the storm, is that crowds started to follow him around all over the place, lots and lots of people. Everywhere he went, there they were, wanting to hear his stories and teachings and waiting to have a chance to get better from whatever they were suffering from.

One time his Mom and his brothers tried to reach him and they couldn't even get close enough to talk to him. Sometimes Jesus and his disciples were so busy that they didn't even have time to eat. So they were exhausted.

What job did the disciples have before they followed Jesus? *[elicit response]*

Some of them had worked as fishermen before following Jesus, so they had this idea that if Jesus got into a boat and taught people from there, it would be easier for the crowds to see him but harder for them to press in on him. They could also get away from the crowd when it was time to rest.

So that's what they did and that's where this story starts.

Here's the part where I want you to use your active imagination (adults I invite you to do this too, of course). You may close your eyes if that helps you to imagine and create a movie in your mind.

You are one of Jesus' followers, it's the end of the day, you are tired and you are by the side of a big lake, getting ready to get into a boat. There's a light breeze.

Imagine where you are standing by the water.

What do you see? (*elicit responses throughout*).

Where are your feet?

Can you see the other side of the lake? That's where you are headed.

How far is the boat from where you are standing? What colour is the water?
What colour is the boat?

What can you hear?

What do you smell?

So now you're getting on to the boat, imagine yourself climbing over the edge.
Get in and find a spot.

Try to imagine as a disciple, what you might be feeling? Are you ready for a
break from all the people?

Are you nervous about going to the other side of the lake where people from a
different culture live?

OK, so you're on the boat, it was a bit of work getting everyone on, hauling in
the ropes, etc. Jesus is at the front and he looks pretty exhausted. It actually
looks like he might be taking a nap, his head is on a cushion.

Maybe you'll find a place to sit down for a bit too. It's good to finally rest and
we're off.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the boat starts to rock back and forth, just a bit
more than before and the light breeze starts to turn into a very strong wind.

What does the wind feel like on your face?

What can you hear?

It's getting worse. The waves are getting bigger, and water is starting to slosh
into the boat. (*elicit wind sounds with the kids*)

You can open your eyes.

Well, the disciples that were on the boat had seen this kind of storm before, most of the time it didn't end well, they had lost friends, boats and cargo and they knew they were in big trouble. They were afraid.

What do you imagine they were afraid of? (*elicit response*)

Do you think it made sense to be afraid in that boat?

I know I'd be very afraid. One of the things that may have caused fear is that they had lost control of the boat. Sails in gale force winds can be more of a liability than an asset; they can get you in more trouble instead of getting you out of trouble.

So now I'd like to ask you what scares you? What are you afraid of?

This week Shadell Permanand (formerly of TUMC) posted on facebook a conversation she had with her daughter Chelsea.

Chelsea: Do you know what grownups are afraid of?

Shadell: No, What?

Chelsea: Not being in control.

I am someone who is an "awfulizer" (it's an expression for someone who is always worried about what could go wrong.) It might be risk assessment, but it adds to my fear because I know all the things I can't control. My brother Dan found a way to make fun of me when we were growing up. He'd say "Oh, no! We're dooomed!" That would put me in my place.

We know what happens next, but the disciples had no idea, they thought they were doomed. The disciples went to Jesus to wake him up and I always wonder what they expected him to do. Why did they wake him up? Solidarity? Did they know the power he had? Were they warning him about the danger?

They woke Jesus up with a scolding. Do you think it is a good idea, to scold your teacher? They were so scared that they even scolded their teacher.

They woke him up. How did they do it? Did they shake him by the shoulder? Did they poke him? "Jesus, Jesus, wake up." They wake him up.

They say, "Teacher, don't you care that we're all going to die?"

I imagine being very tired myself and being woken up from a nap. Anybody who knows me knows that I'm not perky when I wake up. I'd be, "Oh, just be quiet! Let me sleep!"

Maybe Jesus was in a bad mood. Maybe he wakes up and says: "SILENCE! Put a muzzle on it!" (that's how it translates).

And the wind and the waves stop! A great wind, then great calm. Just like that!

Then Jesus turns to the disciples and tries to calm *them* down. "Guys! Why are you afraid, it's OK, it's all over now."

Or maybe he says "Guys, haven't I been telling you about the kingdom of God all day long? You think it will be brought down by a little storm?" "Where's your faith? Come on, stay faithful. Stay with me."

We often hear this as words of rebuke, but I think they are words of comfort. When you're scared what do parents do? Do they get mad at you for being scared, or do they tell you it's going to be OK?

I hear words of comfort in what Jesus says. It's not "you should have believed and there wouldn't have been a storm" it's "calm down, this is the kind of power I have." "Keep the faith."

The thing is, the disciples were still a bit stunned by what had just happened. Apparently the Greek translation says that they still "feared a great fear."¹ The way we read it (NRSV) it says that they were in awe. But they were scared.

Who are you and what have you done with our teacher? Who IS this person that the waters are obeying him!?

They weren't scared of the storm anymore, but they were scared of being in the boat with Jesus.

As one author says about what Jesus did, "He carries out an act that begs for comparison with God's act of creation. Floating on wild chaos, he brings order to the wind and the sea" [with a word].²

¹ Timothy J. Geddert, Believers Church Bible Commentary, Mark.

² Richard R. Swanson, Provoking the Gospel of Mark.

Now let's go metaphorical.

This same Jesus is who we are in the boat with today as followers of Jesus.

So this is Jesus' question to us: What are you afraid of?

As you consider this well-known story, and all the storms we face: the family crisis, the building project, our personal debt...

Or, for me, the storms are all that happened in the news this past while: the religiously motivated destruction of a Christian church in the Galilee by settlers, the ongoing realization of the cultural genocide done to aboriginal peoples, the gravity of the climate crisis and especially the racially motivated killings in Charleston, NC.

What are you afraid of?

Afraid that Jesus might be asleep in a time of need?

Afraid of not having hope? Afraid of having hope?

Maybe even a bit afraid of believing in a God powerful enough to order chaos to be muzzled?

Jesus's first agenda on that boat was to reinstate calm. And he encouraged the disciples to keep the faith, to stay committed to the realm of God. That is his encouragement to us.

The kids read us some verses from Psalm 34, which also carries the following lines:

*I sought the Lord, who answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.*

There's no promise of delivery from danger. There is reassurance that the most powerful force in Creation is in the boat with us.

May we all remember that we are aligned with the God of Creation who can still our fears.