

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today is the halfway point of our 8-week study on Mark's gospel. We're picking up where we concluded last week directly after Jesus shared two final parables – one about spreading seeds and another about an out-of-control mustard weed.

Today we heard that as evening came on that same day, Jesus said, "Let us go across to the other side." So, the disciples put him in a boat and headed across the sea followed by some other boats. As they moved along across the sea, suddenly a big storm arose. The boats started shaking. The wind picked up. Whitecaps surrounded the boat. Even as the boat began filling with water, Jesus was asleep on a pillow, perhaps being rocked by the waves like a newborn. The disciples woke Jesus saying, "What the heck, Jesus. Don't you even care that we're about to die?" Jesus spoke, the sea calmed, and he asked why they were so afraid? And the disciples were in awe of Jesus and murmured among themselves about his power.

Who had heard this story before today? It's a popular story. It was the subject of Rembrandt's famous painting that was stolen in Boston as a part of the largest art heist in history. It's also like another story in Mark's gospel where Jesus walks on water and gets into a boat amid a storm.

But those aren't the only stormy stories in our Judaic-Christian Scriptures. Think of the water, storms, and whirlwinds at Creation, or with Noah and the

ark, or the parting of the Red Sea, or Jonah and the really big fish. All of these are reminders that God can control the wind and waves and overcome the storms. So too, if we look a little closer, we'll see that Jesus revealed to the disciples his power over the stormy chaos of life.

Remember how Jesus wanted to get in the boat and go to the other side? Well, that is a really important statement. Most of the time when we read a passage and we're told that Jesus went somewhere it's giving us important information we need to understand. Here, we find that Jesus and the disciples are going from the eastern side of the Sea which was Jewish to the western side that was gentile, or not Jewish. They're going from the familiar to the foreign. They're leaving their homefield advantage for a new ballpark. With that piece of information, it's hard not to imagine the storms brewing within the disciple's minds.

If I were one of the disciples, I'd probably wonder about going from being part of the Jewish majority to a religious minority. I'd wonder if in this new place they'd speak the same language. I'd wonder how I might be treated. I might begin thinking of all the worst possible situations, all the things that could go wrong, and I might just get myself spinning down a mental spiral that I could not crawl out of. And like a cold front moving through on a humid summer day, the storm inside my head might grow and grow until it had taken over and completely and utterly paralyze me. And as I checked out my fears with others on that boat, it's likely others would feel the same (or, at least this massive storm in my head might convince them of the fears). And before you know it, the whole ship is thinking "what in the world are we doing?" And, once all the people awake were scared out of their mind, there would be only

one person left to ask, and that's Jesus. So in the attempt for this storm in my head to completely drown and sink the entire ship, I'd say, "Jesus, wake up. This idea is stupid. Don't you think going to this new place is going to ruin us? Don't you think there are enough problems to handle here? Don't you think this work that we're doing should be about our people, about our nation, and about our interests?"

It is at that point in the story after "a great windstorm arose," that Jesus woke up. Or to translate it more literally: when a mega storm took over, Jesus was "resurrected." Jesus said, "Peace! Be still!" Then, a mega calm washed over everyone and everything. And a mega awe fell over all those gathered. (So, they took a picture of it and tagged it #wplcawe. JK.)

You see, as Dr. David Lose put it, the problem with the disciples is not that they were fearful, but rather it's that they were paralyzed by it.<sup>1</sup> But, here's the key. Fear is not the opposite of faith, despite what some preachers spewed during the pandemic. As Anne Lamont quoting Paul Tillich puts it, the opposite of faith is certainty, and fear can make it difficult to access our faith.<sup>2</sup> In our fearful states, we so often want to make things black and white, good and bad, right and wrong. But the world is not like that. In fact, God is not like that. For the essence of mercy is embracing grey. And while the disciples were in their fearful state saying that *everything* in this new land is going to be terrible and that the unknown is horrible. I like to imagine that Jesus' statement "Peace! Be still!" continued with something like this: "Yes, there will be difficulties and troubles ahead in this new land, but there will also be gifts and opportunities."

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/2019/07/26/faith-fear-and-the-unknown/>

After all, if we keep reading ahead we know that Jesus will release the demons from a man into a herd of pigs, and after, Jesus and the disciples will be chased out of town while the healed man shares his story of resurrection (Mark 5). Then, after time Jesus will return, and people will bring the sick to so that they too might receive abundant life (Mark 6).

You see, today's reading reminds us that walking with Jesus doesn't assure smooth sailing. However, we know that God will be there with us throughout the chaos reminding of God's presence and challenging us to take off our black and white glasses to see the world with greyish lenses of grace and mercy.

And with that message, I wonder what God is challenging you, me, and us as the church to see differently. Is the chaos of the capital campaign causing us to see black and white instead of the possibilities of both? Are political parties or political candidates, on all sides, using fear to lure us into the cognitive distortion of all-or-nothing thinkings so that it becomes difficult to trust in God's provisions and presence? Are we overcome by the chaos and unknowns of life so that we're taking on water and drowning like the disciples?

To all of that, hear God's call saying "Peace! Be still!" Remember, God is in the boat with you. You are a beloved child of God. Sail into the unknown waters seeking justice, peace, and love with God's refrain, "Peace! Be still!" Amen.