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Mark 4:35-41
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Muzzling a Great Storm: Thanksgiving Day Sermon

A Great Storm

What is the great windstorm that you are going through today? This year many of us have been worried about our loved ones in the hospital with cancer, recovering from falls, and other serious illnesses. Our hearts have gone out to those dealing with chronic issues such as neuropathy, valley fever, and Parkinson's. All the while we have been living in fear of a pandemic that has at times separated us from our loved ones and disrupted our ability to share fellowship meals or worship together. We've had quite a storm this year.

I say this not to upset you, but to stand with you. My heart is heavy too. I see the great black clouds around us and cry out to Jesus. Rabbi, do you not care that we are perishing? Many of us are sick and afraid for ourselves and our loved ones. What then shall we do?

Peace Be Still!

Sing: Don't be afraid, my love is stronger, my love is stronger than you fear.

When the storms of life are raging we turn to Jesus as our comfort and guide. We turn to Jesus because even the wind and the sea obey him. Think about what that means. In the Bible, the sea is not just a dangerous place but also represents chaos and the demonic. In fact, Jesus does not say "peace be still" to the sea but be muzzled. The same words that he will say to the demon possessing the gentile man in the next section.

How then shall we respond as Christians to the storms of life? First, like the disciples, we are entitled to our fear and to accuse God of not taking care of us. Our lives will not always turn out as well as the disciples and crying out to God is a human response. God does not make us into mindless robots or blind people who ignore what is in front of them, Christ makes us beloved. In fact, today's scripture teaches us that what many are fearful about is precisely where Christ is working today. So our fear shows us where the great storm is that Jesus is going to muzzle, but we should not stay frozen in fear.

Second, once we have let out our cries to God, it is time to join Jesus in muzzling the sea. When I meditate upon how to muzzle this great storm of pandemic and illness, I

am reminded of Martin Luther, a great protestant reformer who responded faithfully to the plague. ““Very well, by God’s decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.”¹

What is your great storm? Is it illness, injustice, poverty, or something else? Let us say to our brothers and sisters. Peace, be still. Jesus has sent me to you. Muzzling the sea is a group project because without Christ we cannot, but without us, Christ will not.

Crossing to the other side

This great storm, like every other great storm, is temporary. Be it a year, decade, or a lifetime we will eventually make it to the other side.

Jesus was crossing the Galilee sea from the Jewish side to the Gentile side in Gerasea. And Jesus shifts from telling parables to performing miracles and healings.

This great storm has reminded me about how much we humans need love and a sense of belonging. So as I glimpse that other side, I re-commit myself to loving and reconnecting this congregation. We’ve been apart for too long and I’m after today we may be apart a little longer. But I praise God for the ways we’ve celebrated baptisms, new members, birthdays, new births, and prayed for each other. At the same time, our community is not only those in these walls but anyone that we meet in our lives. So, I hear the voice of Jesus say, whatever you do for the least of these you do for me. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bring good news to the poor and let the oppressed go free. The great storm is at once a great burden placed on our hearts and a call to love more and deeper than ever before.

¹ Martin Luther: Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague