

“Rough waters, a hard place”

November 2010

Hymn “Will your anchor hold” VU 675

Scripture Mark 4:35-40 (New International Version)

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 also were other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, 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 waves died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Prayer Let us pray – Compassionate God, we are not sure of ourselves. Life can be hard and our faith is still in the growing stage. We’re OK when it seems calm, but rough waters still frighten us. We need to feel your presence in this our boat. Strengthen us, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson Our reading from the gospel according to Mark is highly symbolic. The disciples are all in a boat with Jesus, trying to get to the other side of the sea, when a wild storm whips up and threatens to smash the boat and drown them all. In the gospels, and especially in Mark’s gospel, being in a boat together, and especially in a boat with Jesus, is a symbol of being in the church. That’s why the world council of churches uses the boat as their logo. We’re all in the same boat, it is saying. So our story is a picture of the church. The disciples are trying to get to the other side of the sea. The story doesn’t say whether they are going home or going away on a mission. But it presents an image of the church trying to make progress, trying to get somewhere. And soon they’re not making much progress. There is a wild storm, and a storm at sea is a very frightening image to the people of Israel.

So here we have a boat load of Christ’s followers, the Church, trying to go where Jesus has called them to go, and the forces of darkness and chaos have risen up to smash them to pieces and sink them. It is a picture of our endeavours to live the life of discipleship in the Church. All too often it feels as though it is all in vain and our efforts to brave the sea and make it to the promised land on the other side are going to see us driven back where we came from, or swamped and drowned. And where is Jesus when all hell is breaking loose around us? He seems to be asleep and not paying attention to our problems. A lot of help He is.

So the disciples wake Jesus and accuse Him of showing no concern for their safety, but Jesus speaks severely to the wind and the waves and there is immediate calm. But then he challenges the disciples: “Why are you afraid? Are you still unable to trust?” Whatever storms are battering us; Christ is present and can be trusted to get us through. And while it may look to us as though he is asleep or just doesn’t care, he will still get us through. The only question is whether we will trust him enough to not jump overboard.

The disciples placed their security in the boat, and in the conviction that Jesus wouldn't allow anything bad to happen to them. All of a sudden their security was endangered. They were in the midst of a life-threatening storm. It was something they couldn't fight or flee from. Life was closing in on them. The storms of life were washing them away.

This was exactly what was happening to them in their relationship with Jesus. Opposition was rising against Jesus. Things were working toward a violent conclusion. There would soon be the arrest, the crucifixion. Where they prepared for that?

Jesus on the other hand realized that his security was not in the outward reality. Whether things went smoothly or if the storm raged, his security lay in the inner resources of his life. When Jesus rebuked the storm, maybe he was showing that the power of the Spirit was greater than the outward circumstances of life that conspire to destroy us.

Here is an illustration for you:

There was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace and tranquility. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were ragged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell, and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the king looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest...perfect peace.

Which picture won the prize?

The king chose the second picture because, as he explained, "Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart."

In conclusion, how big is your storm? How hard is your hard place? How do you deal with it? No matter how big the storm in our church or in our life, we have the assurance today in this story of Jesus and his disciples, that in faith and in the power and energy of the Spirit, we can weather the storm and we can have peace.

Prayer Let us pray – In our heart, O God, we know you are there behind the rush of life around us. May we always recognize your presence, even when we think our boat is about to sink. Amen.