

Mark 4:35-41

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*

This week's lesson continues on where we left off last week. Jesus has been teaching from the boat using the boat as his pulpit. He taught the people on the hillside with parables of the mustard seed and the growing seed and the sower. From the boat to the shore line and up the hillside Jesus had a natural amphitheater and everyone could hear him clearly. The boat also served as a private conference room where Jesus could gather with disciples only. The now exhausted Jesus gave the direction to go across to the other side of the lake and he fell asleep on the cushion at the back of the boat.

A piece of quiet, although we read other boats were with him (*sing. Verb pl. noun*). He already had quite a following. The Sea of Galilee is actually a freshwater lake but is known for its squalls that can happen at any time. The lake is only 13 miles by 7 miles wide. When I took the tourist pleasure boat trip out on the Lake of Galilee we didn't go far from shore because of the weather which can whip up the waves unexpectedly. In this story a great windstorm arose which apparently did not wake Jesus even though the boat had started taking on water. At least four of the disciples were experienced fishermen but this storm made them fear for their lives. So they woke Jesus and said, "Rabbi, do you not care that we are perishing?"

We've heard those words, haven't we from those we love, from our children, teenagers, members of our family, people we've been helping who say,

“you just don’t care”. Sometimes it’s directed at the church, “I thought the church was supposed to take care of me?”.

When a highly anxious person is in a panic about something, we do not have to be panicked or anxious with them because then we all get panicked and sick. We just experienced this during Covid. When people were on lockdown and told to stay home many panicked and when panic set in we had panic buying, fear then took over, and we had conspiracy theories to help make sense of their fear.

With so many people in the hospital and dying of Covid the fear became real. Just as the fear was real for the disciples in the boat. Let’s face it we will all have storms in life that test us and test our faith. A dear member of the chapel is going through a storm of sorrow right now after losing her son. Others have lost jobs that won’t be coming back and are in a storm of uncertainty and doubt about how to pay for living expenses. Some are going under in a wave of debt. Illness and pain make us fear that our lives will never be the same. We fear when these losses and storms in our lives overwhelm us and wonder how we will ever get to the other side of it.

Jesus confronted the fears and forces that caused the disciples to fear. He calmed the storm with a word. God’s word that spoke creation into being, and ordered the watery chaos on the earth is, here in this miracle, the Creator’s command that stills the storm. The power and presence of God’s word in Jesus Christ is the same Word incarnate who commands wind and wave. This nature miracle is an epiphany for the disciples as they grow in their faith. Their faith is still like a tiny mustard seed. They go from fear of the storm to being afeared with a great fear after the storm is calmed about who Jesus is. Who then is this? The Greek words for filled with great awe are *mega phobos*. They have a “megaphobia” because of what and who has been revealed to them: Jesus, Son of Man, the Living God. This realization would put the fear of God in them! Jesus was with them the whole time of course he wouldn’t let them perish. We are not to be afraid. Faith not fear.

We heard the words “have faith not fear” a lot during the past year. Don’t panic and all will be well. But if you have no moorings in a faith community you don’t have these teachings and promises to hang on to and we saw so many people grasping at straws who let fear control them rather than let go and have faith.

The good news is that Jesus is in the boat with us and will not let us perish. Jesus' loving response is always to save us because God loves us so much that no-one, not one, should perish but have eternal life. We need more peace and calm in our lives. Jesus calming the storm is such a powerful image. That's what Intentional Authentic Evangelism (VCI Mark #2) is all about when we meet people where they are and share a word of hope, a story of how the storm in our lives was calmed through faith in Jesus Christ. Our friends, our family, even though they are people of faith need to be reminded that we are not alone. God is with us in the storm and will not let us perish.

Not many of us here came from a Presbyterian background. One thing believers in the PCUSA fear is evangelism! There's a reason we call ourselves the "frozen chosen"! We are slowly overcoming our fear of talking about our faith and we have given ourselves a new name, "the thawed and flawed". Intentional Authentic Evangelism is both word and deed. It is faith in action and interaction with the current culture. *Next Christians* by Gabe Lyons, has this to say,

"Most people outside the faith perceived Christians as anti-homosexual, judgmental, hypocritical, and proselytizing. While Christians, have been busy defining themselves against one another, the broader culture looks on with disdain. Turned off largely by their own experiences with the church and inauthentic Christians they've known. Many are rejecting organized religion altogether." (p30)

We've experienced a perfect storm and it has made us afraid and frozen to saying anything about what we believe for fear that we'd be labelled that kind of Christian. So for us evangelism is a scary word because of the baggage and less than helpful connotations associated with the evangelical.

We are not that kind of separatist evangelizer. That is not who we are.

We are faithful followers of Christ who want to restore broken relationships, care for creation, and be good stewards of God's grace, loving God, self, neighbor and our enemies.

It is time for us to reclaim the word evangelist and restore its meaning as storyteller of God's good news: telling God's story of salvation, where the Spirit is active in our lives, and who Jesus is for us.

Intentional? "Yes". Authentic? "Absolutely".

*Euangelion* the Greek word from which we get evangelist, means good news! We are the good news people.

Here's my good news story on this Father's Day as I remember my father who died almost 10 years ago. My father survived the Battle of the Bulge towards the end of WWII. After marrying my mother he found a piece of quiet in Scotland and together they raised four children. He was a good, brave, and loving family man. He had faced many storms in life: war, losing his home, life as a POW. He also faced literal storms. You see he was a volunteer with the British Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). As children we loved to hear the stories of his daring rescues in the North Sea on the old lifeboat.

Last year our family had the opportunity to donate towards the building of a new lifeboat. And now I have a cushion with his name on it. L for lifeboat and his name is one of many in tiny print here. My father died of pneumonia and I wasn't able to be by his bedside but I got there in time for the funeral. I prayed God would rest his soul. Although we'd had many God talks, he didn't attend church much. I wanted assurance from God that my father was saved. My prayer was answered and through the Spirit these words came to me

"He has been delivered."

Father's Day is not always a calm, peaceful celebration especially for those whose fathers were absent or abusive. The good news is that all of us have the same Father in Heaven, the one Jesus called Abba. Our heavenly parent is the one who sent Jesus to deliver us from the storms in life and he will take us to the other side safely.

Jesus is in the boat with us. We cannot save souls only God does that. We can be life-savers when we can give hugs, prepare food, bind up wounds, pray, and tell stories of God's wondrous love in our lives.

Have faith people with the triune God we are not alone as we come alongside those who have yet to come to faith, and for those who are already followers, may they be encouraged and strengthened by our words and deeds on our faith journeys together. To God be the glory. Amen.