

Devotional for March 22, 2020 — Mark 4:35-41

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 were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that 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 wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"
Mark 4:35-41 NIV

Thirty years ago, Rembrandt's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* was stolen from Boston's Gardner Museum in the largest art heist in U.S. history. But today, what I find more interesting is the peaceful image of Jesus in the back of the boat.

Some of you tuning in today may know the story well, and you've probably even heard a sermon on that Mark 4 passage. Yet this week, in the midst of a virus-driven storm of fear, this story is more profound than usual.

This week, you have been living in the same COVID-19 chaos as everyone else, while also having to scramble at work, at home, on the roads, or in the grocery stores. And somehow we're expected to stand up in the boat you traverse through life in the midst of humungous, potentially demoralizing waves of uncertainty, anxiety and even sadness, representing Christ for so many who are desperately looking to God for comfort and guidance.

Fortunately, friends I have good news today. If your life's journey is directing you to become more Christlike, which means that you live, grow, and serve like Christ. You are being transformed into a calming presence in the middle of an unsettling situation. As an exercise, let's consider five realities from this story, that can help us and our various communities thrive through this coronavirus storm.

1. Everybody reacts differently to the same circumstance.

You can imagine a variety of reactions from the disciples in the boat. There are disciples drawing closer to Jesus, some overcome with anxiety and nausea, others looking down in defeat. Another with a hand on his head in shock. I can imagine there's a group in the bow grabbing the ropes and rudder, doing their best to not go under. And — like the disciples — each person you encounter will react to this pandemic with just as much variety. How might you offer comfort and encouragement that meets someone where they are and in their reactions to the current crisis before us?

2. Wrestling with the sails won't stop the storm.

Tending to the sails, manning the oars and battening down the hatches all matter. Washing our hands, social distancing and self-quarantine will make a difference. We should do those things. But it won't stop waves from crashing over the sides and taking a toll on lives. Even while doing our best, we may still have to face the worst. What advice will you give to people to help them prepare for what lies ahead in the coming days?

3. Being close to Christ radiates Christ.

In the midst of a storm, Jesus is calm and collected. If you want to be like him, you need to be close to him. Your intimacy with Jesus matters. His divine presence can make you a non-anxious presence with supernatural impact. For some, that will make the difference between swimming and sinking into the waves of tension, fear and uncertainty caused by this coronavirus crisis. Take heart - even the people closest to Jesus were still afraid and anxious. Jesus didn't keep them in despair, but please understand that having doubt and having questions during this time is not dishonorable to God. In fact it's giving him more room to be glorified. In what ways can you draw closer to Christ, so you impact others like Christ?

4. The storm always ends.

We know the ending of this story and we know the boat makes it ashore. In the same way, we know there is a future with some relief and a long recovery to smooth sailing. Because no storm lasts forever. We will get to the other side of the lake to a new normal, even though we will face more storms in the future. But the knowledge that all of us are in the boat with Jesus brings a hope that builds strength and perseverance. Are you living in the balance of empathy and hope for those in your spheres of influence? How can you inspire courage in somebody around you?

5. Jesus can still calm the waves.

God can stop the storm. He can and will do supernatural things we can't explain. But whether you experience a miracle or not, Jesus can still calm the waves in your life. He can calm waves of fear and anxiety. He can smooth a sea of uncertainty and unknown futures. And he can settle the winds of grief and sadness. He will be with us, he is already at work within us, and he invites us to partner with him until more and more people move closer to him in the back of the boat. How can you reveal your faith in God so others experience the calming power of Jesus?

May you live, grow, and serve like Christ within your community, your work, and in your homes this week. Remember to help bring peace and renewed perspectives for people that need encouragement the most.

(PRAYER)

Bible Study for the Family

Read Mark 4:35-41 then go through the questions together.

Try reading one verse then switching off with someone else to read.

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”

36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

38 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?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

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

41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

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1. Has there ever been a time where you were afraid?
2. Trusting Jesus can be hard when we can’t see him. What did Jesus do to make it easier for his disciples to trust him?
3. What do you think happens when we choose to trust in Jesus? Do we keep moving in fear or in faith?
4. Does anybody want to share a time when they trusted Jesus? Was it easy or hard? Was it worth it?