

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49
Psalm 9:9-20
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

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Just Get into the Boat!

It is getting dark and Jesus and his disciples are hungry and worn out after having been with throngs of people most of the day. Instead of resting for the night Jesus pushes them onward and he says, "Let us go across to the other side" (Mark 4:35). His decision to travel to the "other side" of the Sea of Galilee is more than merely a change of venue or scenery.¹ It is an extremely important but dangerous, strategic step in Jesus' ministry that is still in its early stages. The "other side" is foreign territory, known as the "country of the Gerasenes," the land of the Gentiles.² Jesus' message of Good News is not only for Israel but for strangers and even for their enemies – no one is excluded from Jesus' gospel message of love and salvation.

As they set out in their small boat suddenly a squall comes up, which is not an unusual occurrence in the Sea of Galilee, as the disciples who are also fishermen know only too well. They are tossed about by giant waves and horrific winds as the boat is swamped with water. The disciples are panicked and fearful of drowning. They look around in the midst of this chaos and see Jesus asleep on a cushion at the back of the boat.

How on earth could Jesus possibly be asleep when are about to be swallowed up by the sea? They wake him and ask him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). Jesus get up and without one word to his followers, he spreads out his arms and shouts out to the angry sea and howling wind, "Peace! Be still!" (Mark 4:39). The raging storm suddenly subsides. The disciples become stone silent, like the eerie calm sea that surrounds them. Jesus turns to his followers and asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4: 41). Soaked through and through they stand speechless and are in utter awe of the power they have witnessed in this man they know so little about.

This dramatic story tells us a lot about Jesus and the kind of faith we need to be part of God's Kingdom here on earth. The story also reveals our human nature and how hard it can be to take the leap of faith that Jesus expects of us to be in relationship with God. Just as Jesus invited the disciples to get into the boat to get to "the other side" we are given the same invitation. Often just getting into the boat takes all the courage we can muster. When we do we open ourselves to change and the unknown because we have no idea what we will encounter on

¹ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 3*, eds. David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 165 – 169.

² Beverly Zink-Sawyer, 165.

the other side. If the disciples had known that they would be confronted with a crazed man in a cemetery, possessed by demonic spirits that Jesus would cast out and end up in a herd of swine running off a cliff - they probably wouldn't believe it and they most likely would not have gotten into the boat!

Not getting into the boat is also an option. We can decide to play it safe and stay right where we are. This seems by far the easiest path, to stay in on this side of the shore where we know how to navigate the familiar landscape. But, we end up living lives ruled by fear and not by love.

But, if we dare to take that leap of faith (C.S. Lewis' definition of "faith") and step into the boat, we know one thing for sure; we are not alone. On the other side you can bet that there will be changes and challenges of all sorts that will, at times, test the very fiber of our faith. Such is the reality of the world we live in. We know that bad things happen to good people. Hurricanes, tornadoes and all natural disasters are a fact of life on this earth. Marriages fall apart; diseases wreak havoc with our bodies; if we live long enough we face the challenges of old age; people lose their jobs, nations go to war and refugees flee their homelands with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Jesus never promised his disciples that life would be easy and free from anxiety, tragedy and death. In the gospels we read about the incredible challenges that Jesus and his followers faced as they traveled from town to town spreading the good news of love and justice. In Paul's letters to the many churches he began during his mission trips he recalls the horrific setbacks he endured, including being stoned, shipwrecked and imprisoned to name just a few. In today's story Jesus never tells his followers there is nothing to be afraid of. We know that is simply not true. Instead, Jesus asks, "*Why are you afraid?*" Fear is real but also is Jesus' presence in our lives.

What Jesus does promise us is peace. Peace not of this world but the peace of God that passes all understanding. In the midst of the turmoil of our lives our faith in God is the one thing that provides us with a firm foundation upon which to stand to weather the storms of life, no matter how turbulent and frightening the waters become. This is what the disciples missed as they frantically baled water from their sinking boat. Jesus was with them but in a much bigger way than they could possibly imagine. His Word stilled the seas and calmed the winds. It is the same Word of God from which all creation was born, captured so beautifully in the prologue to the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). And, it was the same Word of God that reassured Mary, Jesus' mother, when she was visited by the Angel Gabriel, announcing that she would soon give birth to a child, the Savior of the world (Luke 1:30).

Jesus' presence among us assures us that God's love reigns over this fearful and broken world. And nothing has the ultimate power over us because God's love is mightier than our

greatest fears.³ So we put our faith in God trusting that God that will never leave us to face our troubles alone.⁴

With faith in God's loving presence in our lives we are able to step in the boat and see what God has in store for us on the other side. For this is where Jesus is calling us and where we find the abundant life you and I were created for.

"Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong." (Mandy Hale)

"Perhaps the act of faith is not just the trust that Jesus will still the storm. The act of faith is taking Jesus' invitation to heart... The act of faith is believing that another side is not only possible, it is essential."⁵ It all begins with just getting in the boat.

Amen.

³ Michael L. Lindvall, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 3*, eds. David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 164-166.

⁴ Thomas Merton, portion of a prayer from his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*.

⁵ Karoline Lewis, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3645>, last accessed on June 22, 2018.