

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
FATHER'S DAY
“WHEN YOUR FAITH IS SHAKEN”
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
June 21, 2009
Mark 4:35-41
10:00 A.M. Service

As curious as it may sound, our faith is never stronger than when we are wrestling with doubts, uncertainties. Faith is easy when everything is going our way. It doesn't take much faith to trust in God when we are healthy, wealthy, and wise. But holding on to God takes great strength when our faith is shaken.

The biblical account of Jesus calming the storm is an allegory of the Christian life. Even though Jesus is with us, life's stormy seas can threaten us. However, when we call on him, he delivers us from the terror of the storm.

Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. As fishermen it was a voyage they had made many times. They could do it with their eyes closed. As usual, it was uneventful, until a storm blew in from the mountains and churned the sea into a fury. The force of the storm is indicated by the disciples' reaction. They were terrified, fearing for their lives. They had weathered many storms, but this one was different. They woke up Jesus and asked, *“Teacher, don't you care that we are drowning?”* He commanded the storm to cease, and then asked the disciples, *“Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?”*

In a literal sense, this story is unfamiliar to us. Most of us have never been caught in a storm at sea, and do not expect to be. But in a figurative sense, we are in the same boat as those disciples. If we are not there today, we have been there in the past or will be there in the future. Suddenly life seemed hopeless to the disciples. The bottom had dropped out of their lives. The things they had always relied on were not helping. They were skilled seamen, but this storm was beyond their skill. Their ultimate reliance had

become Jesus, who could always be depended on. But in this crisis he did not seem to care. He was sound asleep!

No one here is a total stranger to this experience. It may never have happened to you in a ship at sea, but it was just as real. You were doing your best, but your best was not good enough. Things were out of control and no one seemed capable of restoring order. In every direction things looked hopeless. How do you deal with such a crisis? Jesus told his disciples that it is fundamentally a matter of faith. But what does this mean for us?

The first readers of the Gospel of Mark lived during a tumultuous time in the life of the young Church. There were challenges and threats on all sides. The Christian movement, in its early days, was far from secure and successful. It was a good time for Christians to be reminded that Christ was in the boat with them. The Son of God was utterly involved in the human condition. He was born in a stable and grew up in a working class family. He interacted with the physically, mentally, and morally diseased. He knew the full range of human pain and suffering, and died a horrible death. Wherever we find ourselves today, he has been there, too. He has even experienced the “**dark night of the soul**”, where it seems God has forsaken us. O, this is one reason we can trust Christ. He has been where we are. He knows our predicaments and understands our sorrows. At the heart of our faith is the affirmation that God in Christ knows the human experience and understands it from the inside out.

How does faith help us in facing fear? For one thing, it reassures us that we are not alone in our fear. We can trust in a caring presence that never abandons us or fails us. God is with us as One who knows our predicaments and weaknesses, as One who has faced all of life’s threats, and as One whose love will never let us go. When we are in a crisis, sometimes our greatest need is not to be delivered from our circumstances but to be assured that we are not alone in them. Children awaken from a bad dream or some other frightful nighttime experience, want one thing above all else. They want the presence of a parent or some other trusted loved one. When we allow our faith to come face-to-face with our fears, we discover that we are not alone. God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is with us and will never leave us.

Speaking of parental love, on this Father's Day, perhaps the best evidence that God cares is that we care. It is a perfectly natural thing to seek our own safety when danger comes. **"Self-preservation is nature's first law."** It is a different matter, however, when we find ourselves caring more for the safety of someone else than for our own safety. The parent cares so completely and so deeply for the child that the parent's own safety may cease to be a consideration. If we as human Fathers have the capacity for such caring how much more does our heavenly Father care for our well-being and our ultimate good? Our caring is but a dim reflection of God's caring.

God is not only with us as a caring presence when we are afraid, but God also works within our circumstances to transform us through the experience. When Jesus was awakened, he rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ***"Quiet! Peace! Be still!"*** When all was calm the disciples said to one another, ***"Who is this whom even wind and sea obey?"*** Who, indeed?

Christ meets us where we are and speaks the most appropriate word for our situation. When we are overwrought with guilt, he is the voice of forgiveness and mercy. When we are estranged from those around us, he is the voice of acceptance and love. When we are in despair, he is the voice of hope and second chances. When we are caught in a storm, he is the voice of calm. But his concern is not merely to rescue, comfort, or support. Everything he says and does is part of a much larger plan. He has seen in us possibilities beyond our imaginations, and he works in our circumstances to transform us in his own image.

As long as we see fear as simply the absence of courage, we will struggle with fear. The New Testament understands fear in an entirely different way. Fear's opposite is not courage but love. John writes that there is no fear in love, and that mature love casts out fear. **(1 Jn 4:18)** Love conquers fear. True faith can be shaken but not destroyed. Nothing can separate us from the eternal love of God. When your faith is shaken, remember that love conquers fear. I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.