

Rev. Shannon Johnson Kershner  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 21, 2009  
Mark 4: 35-41

### Don't You Care?

They seemed to trust him. They – the disciples—had been with Jesus for a while, now. They had seen him heal people from different diseases – even on the Sabbath day when such a move was risky. They had listened to Jesus' teachings about the reign of God; messages usually hidden a bit through parable. "The Kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground..." "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed..." Listen! A sower went out to sow..." The disciples had been present for all of those illustrative sermons. And in addition, Mark goes out of his way to tell us that Jesus had also taken the disciples aside and explained in private what he meant through his parables. In Mark, Jesus wanted the disciples to have a clearer understanding of who he was and who he was calling them to be as his followers.

All of this – the healings, the teachings, the time set apart with Jesus--- all of this had seemed to build a foundation of trust. So at the end of that long day, when Jesus told them they were all going to pile in the boat and cross over to the other side, they followed his instructions. Now, they might have murmured amongst themselves as they stepped over the side of the boat. Knowing what they knew, I would think at least **one** of them would have quietly expressed his caution.

So what did they know? Well, for one thing, they knew they were going to the other side—that is, the Gentile side. Thus far in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' ministry had been concentrated on the western side of the lake, the Jewish side. But now they were crossing over into predominately Gentile territory. It was going to be interesting, that was for sure. A couple of them probably shook their heads at the whole notion as they picked up their oars and waited in line to step into the boat.

But, more than likely, though their destination crossed their minds, the disciples were more focused on the fact that Jesus wanted them to cross the sea, at night. And that knowledge probably made a few of those disciples inhale sharply. For they knew first-hand the dangers of the sea and its always-unpredictable mood. Many of them were fishermen by trade. Many of them had experienced sea storms when the wind would come up unexpectedly, and the dark clouds would gather out of the blue, and the waves would begin to roar and foam, and they would have no idea if they and their fishing vessel were going to survive and make it back home. So each time they kissed their families goodbye, they always paused when their lips touched. It could always be the last time they kissed their loved ones. The sea was a dangerous place.

Furthermore, for these disciples, indeed for all of our ancient Hebrew brothers and sisters, the sea was not simply dangerous because of the reality of natural disasters. Rather, in their understanding of the world and of nature, the sea was the dwelling place for chaos and the demonic. The chaos monster and its cousin, Evil, lived in the sea. So the sea was not only dangerous, but a place to fear. Our Bible is full of references to the sea, especially the Psalms.

And yet, even with all that they knew, at the end of that long day, as the sun dipped below the horizon and the moon showed its face, when Jesus said "Let us go across to the other side," the disciples picked up their oars and stepped into the boat. At that moment, they made the choice to trust and to be obedient to Jesus rather than to give into their fear of the sea.

Maybe the disciples figured that nothing would happen to them since they were with Jesus. They had already seen Jesus dispense with evil spirits with merely a command or a touch. So surely the chaos

would not dare swell that night. They were traveling with Jesus. That guaranteed a smooth ride, right? With Jesus on board, the sea would not dare to raise its ugly storms. The wind would not dare blow chaos into action. They were with Jesus. Really, what could happen to them?

And yet, almost as soon as they had pushed off from shore, a great windstorm arose. Chaos began to swirl and pulsate. The waves beat viciously against the boat. Water poured in. It was as bad as they had ever seen. They only thing they knew to do was to try and hold on for dear life. But where on earth was Jesus? Finally, a few of the disciples found Jesus in the stern, sound asleep on a pillow. The disciples cried out – a cry of anger, fear, and abandonment. “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” “Jesus, do you not care that we are dying out here?”

I have to pause for a moment at the immensity of the disciples’ question. Does it strike you, the way it strikes me, that we have heard that kind of cry before? Does it strike you, the way it strikes me, that we have lived through our own moments, chaotic storms, when we have cried that cry before?

- “*Jesus, do you not care that I am sinking here?*” cries a teenager.
- “*Jesus, do you not care that the cancer is eating him up?*” cries a wife.
- “*Jesus, do you not care my kids are hungry?*” cries a father.
- “*Jesus, do you not care that threats of war never cease?*” cries a young adult.
- “*Jesus, do you not care that she is dying?*” cries a sister.
- “*Jesus, do you not care that I am empty?*” cries a widower.

“Teacher,” the disciples cried-- angry, afraid, abandoned-- “do you not care that we are perishing?”

I am struck by the power of their ability to ask the question, your question, my question. Because we all know that when we are in the midst of a storm of chaos, when the vicious waves of trauma or loss are beating us up, when the waters of grief or fear are pouring in, it is almost impossible not to get angry, or to feel afraid, or to assume we have been abandoned and God is asleep. It is almost impossible not to cry out and to think we need to wake God up to the reality of our world and our lives.

The disciples are asking our question. And they are acting on our question, too, by doing something that perhaps you have sometimes wanted to do – shaking God back into consciousness. They found Jesus asleep on the pillow and woke him up. And as he cleared his eyes and tried to focus on what was happening, the anguished disciples got in his face and asked if Jesus even cared that they were perishing. “Do you even care what is happening to us, Jesus?”

Now as much as I am struck by the power of their ability to ask the question, maybe our question; I am just as struck by the content of it. Because I would have thought that the disciples might have said, “Jesus, stop the storm,” or, “Jesus, deliver us from this fury.” But that is not what they asked. Rather, at that point with chaos and danger swirling all around, the disciples simply wanted to know if Jesus **cared** what was happening. They thought they were perishing, dying. Did he even care?

The disciple cried out and shook Jesus awake. He rubbed his eyes, looked around, and rebuked the wind for inciting such panic. He looked right into the face of the sea of chaos and evil. “Peace,” he ordered. “Be still. Quiet down.” And in response to his command, a dead calm settled over the sea.

Jesus turned back to his disciples. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Again, the content of the questions are important to hear. Jesus did not say “Why were you afraid of a storm?” Instead, he contrasted their fear with faith. As we said earlier, it appeared the disciples had begun to trust him. They had sat, day after day, listening to him teach and preach. They had watched him heal and set

people free. They had heard the amazing things he proclaimed about God and how God would make all things well.

But even more important than all that, lest we forget, Jesus had been with the disciples during the entire time the storm raged. He, too, had felt the viciousness of the waves. He, too, had heard the violence of the wind. He, too, had felt the dampness of the rising water. He had been right there, in the stern of their boat, the entire time. But even with his continued presence, the disciples still struggled with letting their fear take control and their sense of abandonment define them. And with fear at the helm, they felt like they were perishing and Jesus did not even care.

“Why are you afraid,” Jesus gently asked. “Have you still no faith?” They are good questions to ask ourselves when we are being tossed around in our own storms. When panic begins to overwhelm us, and we cannot see the breaking light through the dark clouds, Jesus’ questions are powerful to remember.

For perhaps if we asked ourselves those questions, we might be able to put fear back in its proper place. And then perhaps we would recall Jesus’ words to the storm. “Peace. Be still.” And we would remember that even as the chaos swirled, he was **right there** with them in the middle of it. Jesus stayed with his disciples in the boat, asleep. He slept because he knew that his power was greater than the power of the sea storm. Jesus knew that his healing would overcome the storm’s great devastation. Jesus knew that his peace was at the helm and not fear. Jesus knew it would all happen, the healing and peace would happen, all in his good time. The in-breaking light of the moon was shining on the tumultuous waves even before he spoke.

And one more thing: This story also unveils for us that while Jesus gently questioned his disciples’ loyalty to fear, he did not throw them overboard into the chaos and the danger. He did not say, “That’s it. I have had it. I have told you everything and you still don’t get it. Get out. I am going to go find better disciples.” That was not at all how Jesus responded. He did not respond to their questions with rejection. No. Rather, Jesus responded by continuing to sail with them. He did not resent their struggle. Perhaps he even understood it. We simply know that he just kept on saving them, time after time, even while they kept on questioning, struggling, and fearing they were going to perish.

The disciples cry out through the ages, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?” And Jesus replies again and again, “Peace. Be still. The light is already breaking through, even in the midst of the storm. I am with you always. Be not afraid.”