

“Toward the Other Side”

Mark 4:35-41

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: O Holy One, speak to us, inspire us, touch us, and bless us through Your Word and through the words that You place on each of our hearts. And oh, dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. Amen!

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A few weeks ago, while I was browsing a worship resources website – I got a bit distracted and found myself looking at Christian-themed t-shirts on a related page ...

And I happened to come across a t-shirt that read across the chest: **JESUS TOOK NAPS.**

And underneath it, it said: **BE LIKE JESUS!**

and there was a Scriptural reference to our text for today (Mark 4:38).

And so, for a time, after that, I thought that my message for today would be one about setting personal boundaries and practicing self-care as a spiritual discipline ...

However, as is often the case, when I then opened myself up and allowed our Gospel reading to be in conversation with our current context today, the meaning of our text for this am took off in a completely different direction!

So, let us take a closer look at our reading from Mark for today ...

Now, first of all, you may recall that Mark was the first of the Gospels to be written – and that the author of Mark writes with this a sense of urgency, immediacy and abruptness.

And that is because those earliest Christians believed that the Second Coming of Christ could happen at any moment – and so the Gospel writer of Mark wanted them to be ready!

So, here, in our story today, we are only into the fourth chapter of Mark but **A LOT** has happened ... already!

What we know so far – from Mark – is that Jesus was baptized. He then spent 40 days in the wilderness, and soon thereafter, he was performing miracles and healing people.

And then, he called his disciples – and had been focusing on teaching them in the form of parables ...

Jesus' first days of ministry **CERTAINLY** were **very** busy and active and full – and so, there are Christian writers today who believe that Jesus led his disciples out in the boat that day just to take a much-needed break – to get away for a bit – and to rest and relax ...

And ... as the story is told in Mark, it wasn't long before Jesus **did** relax, so much so that he fell right asleep, right there, back in the stern, and in the presence of his disciples on that boat that day!

But I am not convinced that that is **all** that it was – as to the purpose and mission of that boat trip that day – **all of the way across** the Sea of Galilee ...

For as it was with Jesus' earthly ministry – there was *always* a lesson to be learned, an example to be followed, and a deeper truth to be revealed in every moment with Jesus.

And so, I believe that it is especially **significant** that this pericope begins with Jesus instructing his disciples in this way:

He said, “Let us go across to the other side.”

Let us go across to the other side.

These, my friends, are powerful words – especially coming from Jesus – the one who is the all-time boundary-crosser, way-maker, miracle worker and promise keeper!

Jesus said, “Let us go across to the other side.”

In this story, “the other side” represents the unknown and the unfamiliar. It was Gentile territory, in the country of Gerasenes.

In Mark's Gospel, this might be considered Jesus' first foray into what is clearly outside of the disciples' comfort zone/s.

It is a foreign land – a place far away, off in the distance – and it is home to “the other.”

Surely, then, it is **intentional** that Jesus directs his disciples to go to the other side!

And not only that, Jesus is so relaxed and apparently confident in his disciples' abilities and preparedness to take this journey – that he actually takes a nap while they faithfully do their best to then navigate those treacherous waters during a raging windstorm ... all because they heard Jesus speak directly to them when he said, “Let us go across to the other side.”

And yet, the disciples certainly knew and understood the warning signs; they knew their own limitations; and they knew that would soon be in over their heads – both literally and figuratively.

And so, what did they do?

They cried out to Jesus in their despair and their desperation!
They knew that they couldn't finish their journey without him!
And they knew that they needed his guidance and his help!

And Jesus -- understands their deepest needs – fully and completely.
He responds immediately;
And in doing so, he assures them of his steadfast presence in their lives and on this journey that they are taking together.
And then, he speaks the words that they need to hear, that they long to hear –
in that very moment:

He says, *“Peace! Be still” “Peace! Be still!”*

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As you engage with our Gospel reading for this morning,

I invite you to take a moment and reflect on a time in your own life when you found yourself in uncharted waters, so to speak, perhaps with strong waves, rocking your boat, back and forth, or maybe the winds of change were blowing unrelentingly.

Maybe it was during a personal crisis of some sort.

Or a time of significant transition within your life.

Or perhaps it was through a deep, deep loss that you have both suffered and endured.

What was it that grounded you during those times of uncertainty and change? Who are the ones who provided you with the strength and support that you needed at that time? And what was it that brought you comfort and peace during those difficult days?

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Recently, as I have been dialoguing with this Scripture passage and Jesus’s words, here, “Let us go across to the other side,” I have been reflecting on some of our collective experiences in our journey together as the people of God ...

Now, of course, there is *that* global pandemic – that has wreaked havoc all across our planet – that has completely upended our lives in just about every way imaginable.

The losses have been layered and innumerable, and the anxiety and stressors, indescribable ...

And yet ... as I look back **now**, over these past 16 months or so, **now** that we’ve almost reached the other side of COVID, I am able to recognize Jesus there, in that boat with us, offering his calming and steadying presence and words to anchor us, “Peace! Be Still!”

Throughout this month of June, of course, we continue to celebrate PRIDE as a nation, as a denomination, and as a congregation – as we lift up the resilience and the determination and the giftedness of our LGBTQIA+ siblings and as we also commit and recommit to advocating and demanding equal rights for ALL people!

Just this past week, we were painfully reminded of all of the work that there is yet to do when the Supreme Court sided with a religious

social service agency that refuses to consider married LGBTQ couples as potential foster parents.

In the days since then, I am pretty sure that I have heard Jesus' voice saying, "Let us continue to go across to the other side for we will reach those shores of true equality ... someday."

And then, just yesterday, on June 19, it was the first time that our Juneteenth celebrations all across our nation were finally recognized as an official federal holiday!

And yet, we can also be sure that Jesus continues to call out to all of us from that stern, directing us to paddle on – and to paddle harder – through those deep and murky waters of systemic racism, until we finally find our footing on that other side, on that solid ground of freedom and justice for all!

As Christians and as people of faith, we are all in this boat together – with Jesus at the helm – calling out to us, "*Let us go across to the other side; let us go across to the other side!*"

Thanks be to God – Amen!

