

“Go into the Storm!” A sermon by Jeffrey Kramer
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
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Mark 4:35-41, 1 Samuel 17, 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

This is a very familiar story. It has been a comfort to many of us; looking to Jesus to calm the storms of our life, an illness, family crisis, passing a test we didn't study for adequately. But when we look at the passage, this was a supernatural intervention into the physical world. The disciples weren't any more comfortable with a powerful God than we are. They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Preachers and hymn composers salve our discomfort by personalizing the storm. “When the storms of life surround you, and the waves are breaking in upon you, just remember that Jesus is Lord of the storm!” We avoid our unease with nature miracles by turning them into allegories of the things that try our souls. “Jesus, Savior, pilot me / over life's tempestuous sea,” pleads on hymn.

My generation, the Baby Boomers, is sometimes also referred to as the “Me Generation”, rugged individualism is our collective story. It is very easy for us to turn everything inward and self-ward. God takes care of ME.

I do not want to discount anyone's wonderful stories of God's interventions. But, I don't think our storms are not big enough. Shifting our focus from the disciples and their struggles to Jesus and his authority makes for good news. Very often God speaks of the household or the nation. I want to look at Jesus calming the storms of our Cove Community, State, and World.

It wasn't just Peter or John in the boat with Jesus; it was the twelve and a good many others of those who have been following Jesus. There was a small armada headed across the sea that night. They were all involved in the storm and witnessed Jesus speaking and the sea becoming calm. There is great comfort knowing that Jesus loves me; but, just as true, God loved the world.

Climate change, war, national conflict, religious conflict, income inequality, lack of economic opportunity, poverty, addiction, government transparency, food shortages, and lack of drinking water. There are plenty of crisis to fill our waking hours with worry.

These are all massive problems affecting the whole planet. How can any action of mine make an impact? What are we to do? Throw up our hands and try to enjoy the ride? Each day brings grim news of exploitation, suffering and injustices. Each day dawns and still, disease destroys, children bear burdens not of their own making, human beings destroy one another and creation itself. It takes little effort to look around, shrug our shoulders, and say, “We're doomed.”

We're doomed and there is nothing we can do about it, so why bother getting engaged, giving resources, working for change? Let's hunker down, keep our heads down and try to avoid as much of the mess as we can. Or, let's protect what we deem as ours at all costs. Who can blame us? This is a dog eat dog world, so the saying goes.

There is something in story that won't allow for apathy; a little bit ‘good news / bad news.’ The discomfiting new: Jesus sent the disciples into the storm. Jesus knew the lesson awaiting them later in the night as he crossed the sea. The good news: Jesus is in control of the storm. Jesus is the peacemaker.

David's tools to defeat the giant were five small stones. We have tools at our disposal as we seek to be faithful servants of God, commending ourselves to holy service: five smooth stones, weapons of righteousness, the presence, power and promises of God. No matter the raging storms, the persistent evil, the Goliath-sized threats, we are assured that our faith is not in vain, our courage not foolhardy, because while it may appear we have nothing, we possess everything.

Our God-given gifts, our five smooth stones, whatever they are. God uses kindness, patience, knowledge, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, these weapons of righteousness are more than enough to fell the evil all around us and within us. The power of the One who is Lord of all so powerful that even the seas and wind obey him, will be with us; it is not lost in sleep in the bow of the ship when we are in need.

Why are we afraid? We, like the disciples in the boat feel lost at sea, blown and tossed by winds, overwhelmed by waves, unsure if Jesus, or anyone for that matter, notices or cares about our plight.

If we voice our deepest fears, our heartaches our vulnerabilities, then we discover the presence, power, and promise of God in ways that demonstrate that Jesus does indeed care and does act. One of the greatest tools of faith is honesty with ourselves, with each other, and with God.

Each of the world crisis is manifest in some small way here in the Coachella Valley and in our Cove.

One in ten college students in America is homeless.

One in six Americans is food insecure. Let's look locally, 8 out of 10 school age children in the Coachella Valley don't have enough to eat. If a child is hungry she can't learn in school, that impacts her future, she is destined to poverty.

Here in the Valley there are 3,000 residences without save tap water. Imagine in Mecca transporting bottled water six miles from the market to your home. Water to drink, for cooking, for bathing your new born child.

Jesus sent the disciples into the storm; into what storm is God sending you? What storm can we go as a Church community? This is not a rhetorical question. I am looking for an answer. Not necessarily right this very minute; but, in our conversations over coffee in a few minutes. Next week as we gather again and through the coming months. What storm, with God's power, can we bring God's calming peace to in our Cove and Valley?

The Session has been considering things we can do to impact the community. There is a small team forming to look at the possibilities within our reach. Bring your thoughts forward, if something is storming in the community and it is powerfully bothering you, that might just be your storm or our storm.

God is all about using underdogs and misfits. Little Humans can make an impact; in our Old Testament reading, one youngster's action lead to the routing of the Philistine army. Sarah and Abraham were old beyond usefulness; they became parents of multitudes and nations. Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Yes, I'm an optimist; but I'm not concerned that the glass is half full. Let's be activists! Give the glass to someone in need of drink and then ask God for more.