

### Mark 4:35-41 - Jesus Stills a Storm

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Be silent! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

One particularly memorable panic attack came from our past office administrator—Cathie Kelso. There is never a dull moment in church work. Every day seems to bring some new drama, and the church has been in a time of change for, well my entire ministry, but certainly the entire time that Cathie worked here there were shifts and changes and unexpected events. We were having a staff meeting and I have no idea what we were talking about, what issue had come up or what planned change we were making — but I sure remember Cathie’s response! Now Cathie is someone who should probably never play poker, because you always know what Cathie is thinking. She doesn’t hold back and would sometimes push back or protest when change was coming on too fast. On this particular occasion Cathie declared to the room with a high and loud voice: ***“I’m not panicking! I’m not panicking! I’m just preparing to panic!”***

People prepare for all sorts of things, but preparing to panic is not normally something we do. Panic has a tendency to sneak up on us and overtake us. Panic comes when our senses are overwhelmed and we feel a threat, perhaps a life-threatening threat. Panic is not at all rational. It’s that primitive part of your brain that takes over when there is a threat. It could be that it’s helpful to get you running if a Sabre-toothed tiger is after you — (actually I’m not sure panic can really help you much if any tiger is after you!)—but I can tell you it doesn’t help much in a sailboat. Some of the more recent times I’ve experienced panic were while learning to sail. Nothing about it was rational. Though the wind was high, there was no real danger. I was wearing a life jacket, the water was warm enough, and I’m a good swimmer. I like swimming. But not being able to control the little dingy resulted in my being flooded with fear — so much so that I couldn’t think straight to get out of it. I don’t remember how we got out of it. Probably Alex took over the tiller.

Panic is what happened to the disciples one day while they were with Jesus, and for good reason.

They were crossing the Sea of Galilee with the master when a storm blew up. The Sea of Galilee is a large body of water — not as big as our Great Lakes, but it's 21km long, so from here to Prescott — and 13 km wide. Storms can and do arise quickly on the Sea of Galilee. It can be calm one moment and wild the next.



We know exactly what the boat they were in looked like, because the remains of a first century Galilean fishing boat were found close to the shores of Magdala and excavated in 1986.

First century fishing boats were large enough to hoist a sail and small enough for men to row. This one had a cooking pot outside the prow and an oil lamp dated to the first century. Later, carbon tests of the

wood verified that that boat was in use at the time of Jesus. It's even possible he sailed on it.

According to the story in Mark, when they were halfway across the lake a sudden squall struck. It must have been a frightening moment. Remember that only four of the disciples were experienced fishermen and familiar with the lake and its storms — the others would have been utterly terrified! It looked like the end to them. Amazingly, Jesus was asleep. After a long day teaching the crowds, he must have been exhausted.

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to sleep like that? We've had some good storms and generally they don't freak me out too much, but a good lightning strike on one of trees outside my house wouldn't be great, so I'm always half-awake when a storm hits in the night. But in the morning when I say to the kids "THAT was quite a storm last night!" they respond saying "There was a storm? I guess I slept through it." As I say, it must be nice.

My guess is it was one of the frightened landlubbers who woke Jesus up. "Teacher! We're all going to drown! **Don't you care?!**"

This summer we are going to focus on the Book of Psalms. I think it's going to be a great journey. But crying out "Don't you care?" is a common refrain from people to God in the Psalms. In fact, this scene is almost an echo of Psalm 44:23-24

*Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?  
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.  
Why do you hide your face  
and forget our misery and oppression?*

I just want to point out that it is natural and normal for Christians to have that sentiment when we are flooded and overwhelmed. Even Jesus cried out from the cross “My God, my God — why have you forsaken me!” Which is pretty close to saying “Where are you? You’ve abandoned me! Don’t you care about me and about what I’m going through?” So, if people in the Psalms cry out that way, and the disciples cry out that way and even Jesus cries out to God, the odds are good that we will have moments like that too. We are human. We are fragile.

In that space of panic, they wake Jesus up and say “Don’t you care that we are about to drown?” I wonder what they expected Jesus to do? I doubt if they thought he could do anything. I think they just wanted him to be awake and aware of the danger and their great fear. He was their leader. He needed to know that they were all in danger of going down.

But to their amazement, Jesus stood up. Everyone else would have been down low holding on for dear life in that little fishing boat. Mark’s gospel tells us what Jesus called out: “*Peace! Be still!*” Who was he speaking to — the disciples, or to the wind and waves? Was he telling the disciples to calm down, or the waves? Could it be that he was addressing both? Jesus’ abrupt command means literally “Be silent! Be muzzled!” And the text uses the word ‘rebuke’ so the words Jesus says are said like a command; almost like he was casting out a demon. Maybe he was. Maybe Jesus was speaking to fear itself.



I can remember a couple of years ago going to an aerial adventure place like Tree Top Trekking in Hilton Head, South Carolina. This is one of these places where there are ropes and obstacle courses in the air. You start at a beginner course, move up to intermediate, advanced, and then there is an intense expert/military grade level. You do this over about 2 hours, and while you get better as you go, you also get more tired, so handling the more difficult courses gets harder.

I can’t quite remember how far we got (intermediate or advanced) but I remember there was a next level that we decided we were too tired to attempt. I’m glad we stopped. There was another family that went on — and their daughter, who was about 12 or 13, had a total panic attack. She was in tears, and just couldn’t, wouldn’t, move.



The main guide climbed over to her. Everyone is harnessed in, and the guide could have lowered her to the ground, but she decided to talk her through the course. She did it in a classic drill sergeant voice: “Look at me!! You look at me! You’re going to put that foot right here! No — don’t you look down — you *look me in the eye!*” Meanwhile the kid was a blubbering mess. I wasn’t sure this was going to work, but slowly and surely this girl, whimpering “Yes ma’am,” managed to complete the course and get back to the base. I’m glad the guide got her through, because though the girl was shaky, she was also clearly proud that she had overcome that obstacle. Had they lowered her to the ground she would have felt like a failure, embarrassed and humiliated by the whole experience.

I don’t know about you, but sometimes I need a drill sergeant. I need a guide who will get me to focus on them while they give very specific instructions to get me through a situation. Panic is not helpful. Being flooded with fear doesn’t help us to do something. In those situations, you really do need a guide who can pull you through it.

It is hard, but trust — trust that you are not alone in those moments. Jesus may seem that he’s asleep but he’s definitely in your boat. He’s right there with you being rocked by the same storm you are in. If it’s a full-blown proper panic attack you are having there is probably nothing I can tell you to do because at that level of overwhelm you just have to get through it. I’ve witnessed a few proper panic attacks and there is no talking that will help. I just held them and sang until it passed.

But if it’s on the level that I had in the sailboat and that the disciples had in their boat — overwhelmed, but still with the ability to do something small, call out to the one who is with you. Wake him up!

How? Singing can really help. Remember when Pastor Stewart was working deep in a mine? A superior’s light was going out and he asked/ordered Stewart to give him his working light. He ordered him to stay put and not let anyone by while he went on to check on a situation. But that left Stewart alone in pitch blackness for hours. He could feel the fear creeping in. Had he been forgotten? What if his boss returned by a different tunnel and forgot him there? What did he do? *He started singing every hymn he knew!* Fear is in the body, so doing things that connect your body and brain are good. Controlled breathing is good. Breathe in. Hold. Breathe out. Add a mantra like “*Maranatha* (Come Lord Jesus).” Reading passages of scripture out loud can help to focus the mind off the fear. Breathe.

In the same way that those kids stuck on the high ropes course had to keep moving through the course and through the fear, we have to keep moving and trust that the fear will keep moving too!

But you know, sometimes we wait too long to wake up Jesus in our boat.

Whatever or whoever those words of Jesus were meant for, it worked. As quickly as the storm blew up, it ended. And everything was calm. The disciples were very afraid before ... but now they are terrified. "*Who is this?*" they said to each other. "*He gives orders to the wind and the waves and they obey him!*"

Jesus looked at them and asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Faith here is about trust. Jesus is saying to them: "Why are you afraid? Can you not yet trust the God you see in me?"

We can hear judgement in those words ("Why are you not better?") but I don't think that's what Jesus was saying. I think Jesus was saying "I long for you to grow in your faith so that you *do* trust that God is with you in frightening times." Once we decide to follow Jesus, it is on us to deepen our faith through practices like prayer, meditation, and scripture reading, as well as connecting with and building community and practicing actions of justice.

"I'm not panicking! I'm not panicking! I'm just preparing to panic!"

You know, the more I think of it, the more I think Cathie had it right. Maybe we do need to prepare to panic.

There's been a lot of talk on the news about this heat wave and how heat dome effects have increased. We've tripled the average number of days from the 1980's that are over 30 degrees. . It was something like 7 days in the '80's and now it's more like 20 or 21 days. And a report from the Ontario provincial government says that over the next several decades it's likely to increase to an average of 60 days over 30 degrees in Southern Ontario. The implications to health, to livestock, to infrastructure like schools is huge. My husband said to me the other day: 'I don't think I have faith in humanity to do something about the Climate Crisis.' We're just too busy arguing and going to war to actually come together and do something meaningful.

The Climate Crisis along with other big situations is a storm gathering — but it's gathering so slowly and it's so big that it's tempting to give up hope and just hunker down and start rocking back and forth.

But now is the time to prepare to panic! Ok maybe not prepare to panic, but to prepare to be able to do *something* in the middle of what is overwhelming. We need to be able to organize and take meaningful action that will help so that the situation does not get much worse. We need to adapt to a changing reality.

Our world is changing in all sorts of ways, many of them frightening. If we want peace then we need to learn to follow and trust the One is on the move! Remember, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life. Jesus didn't stick to the shores – he crossed stormy lakes. The disciples were far from perfect, but they were learning. I bet that the next time they were in a boat in a storm, they had just a little less fear.

My daughter Petra does that same kind of job as that drill sergeant. She works at Tree

Top Trekking just outside of Brockville. Actually, she's the third of my kids to work there — following in Anna and Stanley's footsteps. I can remember being on a climb when Anna had to rescue a panicked climber — but she did it in a decidedly more Canadian way. In an up-beat, sing-song voice she said: "Ok, you got this bud! You can do it! You're going to put that foot over here... yup that's right! No, no, don't look down! Just swing that hand over here. Yah, you got this!"

Jesus didn't give up on the disciples, and he won't give up on you or leave you. He loves you. So keep moving! Do something, one small thing, and trust and never give up hope that God is good ... all the time.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

\* \* \*