

BIBLE READING: Mark 4:35-41

SERMON

This past little while has been a strain on businesses and those whose lives are affected by them. Covid has certainly impacted the air travel industry. Many people have been laid off and those who have got work are living hand to mouth it seems. It has affected everyone. Imagine being called into work by your boss. Then as you enter their office to be told, "Sorry Jill, we can't keep you". And just like that they are out of work.

The experience can be overwhelming and bewildering. Going from a life that is under control and predictable suddenly comes unglued and no longer goes the way we expect. Life does that sometimes. Sometimes circumstances come in and we are overwhelmed by what is happening in our lives. We wonder whether or not in the midst of things out of control there is any way in which we can discover the help and the love of God.

In our Scripture passage for today there is a wonderful story that is told about Jesus and the disciples. The scene is a vivid one. It's the story of a small boat tossed in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, who were experienced fishermen, find themselves in a situation which was beyond their control, more than they could manage. And where was Jesus? Where was their master? Where was the one who they were following?

Here is the story as it is told in Mark's Gospel in the fourth chapter. We are told that at the end of a long day of teaching and preaching and healing and helping, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the sea." They left the crowd behind and they took Jesus along in the boat just as He was: tired, worn out, and exhausted. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern sleeping on a cushion.

The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Peace. Be still." Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have your faith?"

They were terrified and they asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him." The disciples who knew what a storm was like knew that they were in over their heads. They had done everything that they knew how to do. If they were at the end of their human resources in that circumstance they looked for the person they expected to help them. They had learned as they had walked with Jesus that He had extraordinary powers and abilities. They had seen His heart of caring compassion. And yet here they were in the worst night of their lives and Jesus was sound asleep.

Sometimes when circumstances of our lives break in upon us, it feels like that to us. It feels as if when the waves are threatening to swamp our boat that God is asleep and is nowhere to be seen, nowhere to be found. In that circumstance we wonder just as the disciples wondered about Jesus. It is interesting that their question about Jesus is a question that says: Don't you care, Lord? Don't you care, Rabbi (or teacher)? Don't you care if we drown? Are you so indifferent to what we have to deal with that you can just sleep right through it?

Thrown out of work, faced with an unexpected and frightening medical diagnosis, struggling with financial pressures, caught in a relationship which seems to be deteriorating and going nowhere, or a phone call that comes and all of a sudden the heart leaps in pain and anguish, we cry out in spite of ourselves, "Lord, can it be that I have looked to you, I've sought your help, I've discovered so many good things about your love, and yet here in this circumstance it seems that you don't care, that you are not here, that you are sound asleep? Don't you

care if we drown?" And yet they did the right thing in the midst of those circumstances. They knew where to cry out. They knew who to cry out to. And the person they cried out to was the Saviour. They were discovering more and more about His love, about His compassion, about His ability, and they woke Him with their cry.

Jesus in other places in the New Testament says to us that it is all right to cry to God. In fact, God invites us to cry. We are told to ask, to seek, to knock, and to pound on the door of heaven. You can almost see the disciples here as the waves break in and the storm is furious. They do the one thing that is left to do. They had done all that was possible to do with their human skill and now they cry in their neediness to Jesus. And Jesus hears and responds to that cry. Our fears are so often very strong when the storms threaten to overwhelm us, that we can cry to Jesus and know that he hears and that he will respond to the cry of our hearts.

I was reminded recently of a call I received from a woman desperate and near exhaustion. Her mother was dying and she wondered if I could go and say a prayer for her mum. When I got to the Nursing Home and found the room. I walked into what seemed very much like a storm, the lady's mother was screaming and in obvious physical and mental anguish. Her daughter stood by the bedside and tried to soothe her mother. Nothing was working. I wondered what I could do to help.

As I looked at the mother's ravaged and failing body, at the desperation in the daughter's eyes – I found myself crying out, "God, where are you?" And in my cry I knew no answer, but I knew that I wanted to experience the presence of God in the midst of these difficult circumstances. I wanted to know that the heart of God was the heart that is shown in Jesus who was compassionate and caring. And so I prayed. I prayed for the mother to know God's forgiveness, God's mercy and love. I prayed for her daughter standing next to me, full of grief and hopelessness.

And as I prayed the mother began to stop crying out. Her body relaxed, and she started to close her eyes. After a while I left and the mother died later that night.

In the account with the disciples we find that after the disciples had cried out, that Jesus got up. Then he did something that even the disciples, with their experience of Jesus, had not expected. He actually speaks to the waves and to the wind. The word that he speaks is the word *peace*, be still. And then the wind died down, it was completely still, and there was calm. Much of the turmoil in our lives isn't simply the turmoil from the outer circumstances, it's the turmoil that churns within us, tearing us apart. We cry out to God and then to our astonishment we discover that God comes. God is not absent, but present and God speaks to the storm that is within our turbulent and tossed spirits.

I went and did the funeral for the lady's mother, and we wept together just as Jesus wept at the grave of a friend. And as we cried and prayed there and experienced in ways beyond understanding what the disciples experienced, we found that God gives peace - peace that passes understanding - because God is not simply a God of compassion, God is a God of power. A God capable of taking control when we are out of control.

Though our questions are not finally answered yet and are left in the mystery of God's love, still we see God's comfort, God's power, God's presence, and strength. God is there for us. The disciples, when they cried out to Jesus and experienced Jesus rising and rebuking the wind and calling for peace, we are told, had a response that I think sometimes we have when we call out to God. Wondering if God will really answer, and then being surprised when God does. The disciples were more than surprised when they saw not only the compassion but the power of God at work in Jesus. We are told that their response was one of awe and even terror because they had never experienced this kind of loving power in a

person; in Jesus whom they, in the adventure of faith, were discovering about more and more, day by day. A person like them and yet more than they were. One who cared and helped and came to be with them in their circumstances, just as God today comes to be with us in our circumstances. God, our Saviour who knows our cry, knows what it means to be in a boat swamped by the storm and yet has the power to give peace and strength and help even in the midst of those difficult circumstances. The disciples called out for peace and God met them at their point of need. We may call for peace and God, through Jesus Christ, will meet us at our point of need as well. May this be true in your life this day and through the days ahead.