

BEACHBURG PASTORAL CHARGE

Worship Service, August 15th, 2021

Welcome

Good morning. Well, I couldn't do a lakeside service this summer without covering today's scripture from the book of Mark where Jesus calms the storm on the sea of Galilee. I can say that only once in my 60 years on this lake have, I ever been caught in a storm like the one described in today's scripture and feared for my life. I was 13 years old and was out in the big end of the lake and a 40 knot wind from the west had produced 3-4 foot swells that threatened my 12 foot aluminium boat, but by the grace of God's presence my limited abilities at the helm pulled me though.

Although today the waters are serine, this past week these waters mimicked those same patterns that we see throughout our life, intense storms followed by periods of calms seas, hopefully knowing that at all times Jesus is in the boat with us. So let us come together in prayer as we seek that calm reassurance in our life.

Opening Prayer

Mighty God, you speak a word of peace to calm our troubled sea;
Caring God, you nudge us away from fear and toward faith;
Ever-present God, you fill us with awe, but also raise many questions with no easy answers;
Open our eyes to see you in our boat today,
Strengthen our hearts for the challenges that lie ahead,
Open our ears during this time to hear the word you speak.
This we pray, In Jesus' name. Amen

Opening song

Let us now listen to Our opening song by the group Casting Crowns, entitled "Praise You In This Storm"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YUGwUgBvTU>

Scripture Mark 4:35-41 - Jesus Calms the Storm

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him

along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.³⁸ 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?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Meditation - Crossing to the other side

Many centuries ago a boat load of disciples feared for their lives as the calm sea of Galilee erupted and terrorized them.

Or, if you would like an image of calmer waters, one of my favourite quotations from Henry Thoreau, is,

A single boatman, passing up or down, unavoidably shakes the whole of a wide river, and disturbs its every reflection.

One good thing about a church community is that we get to do that with and for each other - rowing up and down the rivers of our lives. It is one of the good things

about the way church has changed over the years.

Ministers and people realize that we are in this together. There is shaking and disturbing of reflections, of ideas, of attitudes and actions. Over the years, I have been affected by you the people in our congregations as hopefully you have been affected by me. I have learned a lot from you, as hopefully you have learned from me.

Through the years of interaction, we learn to be the church together. We survive because we have been willing to work things out, and because we've been able to trust in the grace of God who calls each of us to do ministry in our own way, with our own unique gifts. We have not done it perfectly, but then again, who does?

One time a number of years ago I heard an ad on the radio for a musical when I worked in Toronto. It was called, *I Love you. You're Perfect - Now Change!* Aren't you glad that God does not say that to us as God calls us into the church and sends us out to the world - "I love you. You're perfect. Now change?" And do you ever long eagerly, as I do, that we could learn to deal with other people with the same compassion as God deals with us? Will we ever learn to take another person just as they are?

That little phrase from Mark, the master of the tiny

details - just as he was - appears in our scripture reading today. Mark is the one gospel writer who includes the smallest of details in his stories. Jesus has been teaching from the boat all day long. He's tired, exhausted. So when evening comes, he says to his disciples,

"Let us go across to the other side." Mark says, "And leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat."

Taking Jesus as he is means not manipulating him into our image of who he is and what he should do. If the disciples thought they were going to quiz him on the parables he had been teaching, forget about it.

They no sooner hoisted their little sail and were under way, when Jesus was fast asleep on a pillow (again Mark's little detail) in the stern of the boat.

I know that I have trouble falling asleep when anyone other than myself is driving the car. So that would be the ultimate in trust.

Jesus falls asleep, leaving the crossing of the lake to his friends. They knew the lake. Some of them were fishermen. What have you got to worry about when you are out with a bunch of fishermen?

I have called this sermon, "Crossing over to the other

side.” I didn’t mean for it to sound like a funeral sermon. It seems like a fitting theme to build a reflection around.

One of the keys to this scripture is that Jesus is the one who says to his disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side.” All of us make many significant crossings to the other side in our lifetime. In 2010 I made one. Several of you have made it – crossing over into the wild and wonderful world of a new vocation and for some of you that new vocation may include retirement.

I was viewing some Youtube videos this week and I came across a video from 1969 in which Woody Allen was interviewing Billy Graham.

Woody said, “You could convert me, you know, because I’m a pushover ... and if you make it appealing enough and promise me some wonderful afterlife with a white robe and wings ... I could go for it.”

Billy Graham responded, “I can’t promise you the wings ... but I can promise you a wonderful, exciting life.” And Woody Allen comes back with “Well one wing maybe?”

When I changed vocations, I didn’t expect wings or

halos, but I did look forward to the crossing (although with some trepidation). It could be a wonderful, exciting time.

But this is only one of life's crossings. There are many others, for example, when a young person crosses from school into work; a child from elementary school into high school; a person of any age crossing from being single to getting married; to having a baby, to becoming a parent or a grandparent. Crossing over is significant in our life. It is important also for Mark. There are several crossings of the lake in Mark's Gospel.

These crossings are for specific reasons. In this crossing of the Sea of Galilee, the reason for being in the boat, is to get to the other side. It is not a private time for teaching, or a pleasure cruise or anything else - simply to get across to the other side.

But what's on the other side?

The Sea of Galilee, they say, is geographically in the centre of the country. On the one side, more or less, are Jewish towns and people, on the other, Gentile villages and people.

Jesus is saying to his disciples that it is time to cross over into new territory, to take our message to another world.

Christians have always believed in mission. We are called to take the story to others. What crossing into other territory is God calling us now to make as a boat load of people we call the church? What is that other world that is waiting over there? Who are those people?

Jesus is calling us as individuals and as a church, to cross over to another world, to be with another kind of people. I can't even imagine what the church is going to have to look like as it tries to respond and follow Christ where he calls. We can't do it and won't do it the way we are. That's frightening. That is the riling up of the sea beneath us.

The disciples, got part way through their voyage and were struck without warning by a horrendous storm. As water spills in over one gunnel, we can see their faith spilling out over the other.

Noel Coward has a play called *Design for Living*. One character in it complains that with all the inventions of this magical age, nothing has been invented to create quiet and calm.

When storms hit us as we are sailing along, it is easy to become terrified. We forget Jesus is in the boat with us. If we do remember, we want to wake him up, to accuse him of not caring.

I wonder if sometimes if it would be better to let him sleep. He has given us resources of faith. We can help each other. We can get through the storms by sharing our faith, and remembering that he is still with us in the boat.

And as we remerge we have the chance to become a more vibrant church. a wonderful opportunity to use your own resources.

We have the chance to awaken our sleeping faith, and let it help us as we cross over to the other side learning to be the church in a different way.

But you will find no easy answers, no easy grace. Did you notice that the disciples are even more terrified after Jesus calms the storm than they were in the midst of the storm.

The story ends with each wondering about the other. Jesus wondering about their faith. The disciples scared to death, wondering who is this man who calms the sea, and the wind, and their lives.

The disciples come through this terrifying experience realizing that they are in the presence of a power greater than the storm. They come through not with

answers, but with a question, Who is this, that even the winds and the waves obey him?

I'm sure we would all prefer answers, when life's storms hit us, or when it is our turn to cross over into new and possibly frightening territory. But instead of answers we have a questioning and a growing faith. Who is this? What does he mean for my life? Where is he calling me to go? It takes courage and faith to ask and to respond to such questions.

These days we are living through a call for calm when we are tempted to panic, for faith when swallowed by fear.

Speaking of faith, Barbara Brown-Taylor writes,

Faith is like a rope bridge over a scenic gorge, sturdy but swinging back and forth, with plenty of light and plenty of air but precious little to hang on to except the stories you have heard: that it is the best and only way across, that it is possible, that it will bear your weight.

All you have to do is believe in the bridge more than you believe in the gorge, but fortunately you do not have to believe in it all by yourself. There are others to believe it with you, and even some to believe it for

you when our own belief wears thin. They have crossed the bridge ahead of you and are waiting on the other side. You can talk to them if you like, as you step into the air, putting one foot ahead of the other, just that: just one step at a time. If Jesus is who he says he is, the bridge will hold. Thanks be to God.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The worst storms, Jesus, are the ones caused by our fear, when we grow afraid of losing our power, or we grow suspicious of the power of others, when we refuse to acknowledge your mysterious authority;

Yet, it's in the storm that we find our capacity to love. In releasing our weak claim to power and opening to your reign, we discover a new way of seeing ourselves - as called and useful and beloved - and the other, whoever they may be - as dignified and precious and beloved.

Here in the storm, Jesus, we need you, and we need each other, and the love you give us to share, leads us through sacrifice and self-giving, to peace and calm, if only we will lose our hold on fear.

O God, Keeper of our lives,
you know the hardness and gentleness of human hearts.
You call your people to faithful living.
Through the storms of life that bring
suffering and fear, joy and laughter,
teach us to turn to you for all we need,
so that we may come to know your presence
even in the midst of the trials that surround us.

Loving God, when we are inclined to worry or panic,
speak with authority to us.

Speak directly through Jesus so that fears may be confronted and our faith reinstated.

Through him and in him let us spend our days and nights with the courage and peace of those who know they are being saved and sustained by an unflappable grace.

Eternal God as we ask that you accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray that from the grace we have received, what we say and what we do will enable those around us to glimpse the life of your Son, who calmed the storm with words which still echo down through the centuries, *'Peace be still' and whose words of prayer continue to calm us...* Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song.

I leave you now with our closing song entitled "Still" performed by group Hillsong United.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abDzMnIybqs>

Have a Blessed Week. Until We Meet again.