

## Have Faith

Mark 4:35-41  
June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

She had left her home with blue curtains, open windows, the walk to the market where she could buy fresh dates, and her brother.

She served me tea in the small apartment in the homeless shelter where her family lived now—no blue curtains blowing, no brother.

She told me how she prayed five times a day, prayed inside tents, prayed with the sound of explosions, prayed with her prayer rug on the asphalt outside of a rest stop on I-95.

I met her when I worked as director of a homeless shelter and housing programs for Shelter House.

By day I worked as a director of a homeless shelter and other housing program, and at night, I went to seminary.

At night I learned about theology intellectually, and by day I understood what theology meant.

I learned about theology and war, and then I sat next to a 6 year old boy from Afghanistan who, at a Nationals' baseball game, pointed to aircraft flying overhead and said, "Predator drone."

I learned about the theology of sacrifice, and then I met the woman who told me that she wanted to be a doctor in honor and memory of her father.

Her father had been a doctor, a good, decent, ethical doctor.

And when the Taliban had ordered him to murder people, he refused, knowing that would mean that he himself was murdered.

Later, after his death, the family's home was burned, and they fled in the night, eventually coming to America just after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. When they arrived in Texas, they were told not to wear their head coverings, not to identify themselves as Muslim. They were called terrorists, even while their father had given his life opposing terrorism. They were told, make a way for yourself. They were told you can't live here, no landlord wants to rent to you.

Today is the United Nations' World Refugee Day. It is a day to honor the ways that refugees and migrants shape our world, and to remember our commitment to their greater inclusion. It's a day to remember that, as Warsan Shire writes,

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well

So it is fitting that in today's lectionary reading from Mark, we are inside a storm.  
It's evening.

The disciples and Jesus have spent the day surrounded by people, Jesus talking  
about the kingdom of God, telling stories.

And they are now together, this collection of boats, crossing the water.

They're going to this place of the Gerasenes, Gentiles.

This place of Roman occupation and demon-possessed people.

And this is the time between shorelines.

The space between.

Nighttime, rest time.

They're exhausted from the full day, and uncertain about what comes next.

Lights are scarce, so there's only so much those in the boat can see.

The wind is picking up, making the disciples' faces feel raw.

Their throats are scratchy and their eyes are getting red.

The waves are higher and more forceful, like a song that plays faster and faster  
with more flat notes that don't fit.

Violent waves slap against the wood of the boat.

It's hard for them to hear each other when they speak.

Then there's the feel of cool water as it starts to seep inside.

The disciples are trying to sweep out the water,

Trying to pray,

Trying to stand up in the boat,

Against the wind...

And it all feels a bit futile.

And somehow Jesus is sleeping through it.

He even has a cushion under his head!

The disciples point to each other, confer.

Will you be the one to wake him?

No, how about you?

We need him!

Finally, one reaches out, shakes his shoulders.

Maybe it was Andrew who shouts and feels his voice eaten by the wind as he  
asks, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus, waking doesn't first answer them. He stands up, wipes the hair out of his face, turns and addresses the wind and the sea.

And he says—Peace, be still?

What we hear translated as that was actually more like, “shut up wind, wear a muzzle, waves!”

And after he says those words, there's a pause....

A long inhale and exhale, like the sea and sky are deciding what to do.

And then, calm.

And there are the disciples, struck with awe, having watched all of this.

And that's when Jesus looks over at them. We don't know his tone here, don't know if this question was rhetorical or meant to be answered.... But he has a question for them. “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

They, gaping, turn to each other. “Who then is this?” But in its first language the verse was actually more like “Who the hell is this that even the waves and the wind obey him?”

This is a dramatic story with dramatic symbols.

Water, in Scripture, often represents chaos.

The symbol of water calls us back to Genesis, with the creation of order from chaos.

So this is a story about a trip across chaos.

A trip across chaos for Jesus, for the disciples, for refugees, for us.

I read probably twenty commentaries about this passage that said some version of the following interpretation: This is a symbol of how there are storms in all of our lives, and we need to trust in Jesus in those times. We just need to hold on to him.

But each of these commentaries left me unsatisfied, like everyone was leaving out part of the story....

What about the times in our lives when we call out for the storms to stop and they don't, but they just go on?

What about when the father does what is right and he's killed for it?

What about when the teenager is diagnosed with cancer?

What about the mother and child at the border asking for asylum after the father was killed by a gang?

What about those suffering from drought or blistering heat?

We know that the storm does not always stop at our call.

It does not always stop when we pray all the prayers, light all the candles, sacrifice, do the right thing.

And all these commentators judged the disciples....

Oh these disciples, water is coming into the boat and the wind is knocking them off their feet and they're afraid.

It felt so dismissive of them.

I think that was Mark's intent in the Gospel too—to give us these people who can't get it quite right, foils for us.

But wasn't the disciples' response actually very fitting for what's going on around them?

Martin Luther King Jr spoke about the concept of “prophetic maladjustment.”

The term “maladjustment” comes from psychology, and it means “being unable to cope with the demands of one's social environment.”

But there are times that we should be unable to cope with the demands of an environment because they are not holy or balanced. And to be prophetic is to call attention to them.

Writing of this, Willie Francois says, “We need to embody maladjustment to inequity and injustice. We need to be maladjusted to a hyper-racialized state that over-incarcerates.... We need to be maladjusted to the gutting of voting rights and the redrawing of electoral maps so that politicians can choose their voters.”

So let's look at the disciples for a moment. Let's see how they're honest about being afraid and uncertain.

Jesus shows them how to speak to the chaos.

Having the feeling that something is wrong might not be something for you to ignore, but something to pay attention to more deeply.

You want to respond because you can tell something is not right.

And so you too can speak to the chaos.

Have faith, Jesus tells the disciples.

Have faith.

But what does that mean?

To have faith, do you need to agree to certain terms?

Can you have faith at 10 a.m. but not at 3 p.m.. when you reconsider your views?

Here's the definition of faith that I offer today—not from systematic theology, not quoting a scholar, but my own.

Having faith means being open to the possibility of our hearts becoming larger in any circumstance.

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(Show image on screen.) An artist friend shared this image this week, writing of how this is true to her experience.... We are taught to think that over time, grief will get smaller, but really it's that our container can become larger.

AG Harmon remembered his father's life in an elegy he wrote.

<https://imagejournal.org/2016/10/10/elegy-for-my-father/>

Harmon tells us this of Roy Franklin, "The stories of my father would stretch from a boyhood in Mississippi that was poor but love-filled, through career of courage and dynamism, and a later life of purpose and endurance. He lived his days in bold joy, in unending commitment and generosity of self. He was, to the end, a happy warrior.

But I cannot tell all of those stories now. Only one, of those thousands I could share, must suffice:

At some point late in his career as a surgeon, a colleague told my father that there was a destitute man living in a cabin somewhere in the woods nearby. The old man was dying and alone. Having been a poor boy himself, and always keenly touched whenever he heard of someone in need, my father decided to do something about it. With his colleague to lead the way, Daddy traveled to the place in his truck, went back into those woods, found the cabin, and took the old man out.

It was Christmastime, and Daddy had the man admitted to the hospital, where he would be warm and safe and cared for. This man had been starving for love and affection, but also starving for food—and my father saw to it that he got anything

he wanted from the kitchen staff. It seemed the man could not get his fill of biscuits and gravy, and when the cook, perplexed, told my father that the man only wanted those—Daddy said, in his customary way—“then give them to him, every meal, every day, as long as he’s asking.”

That was because he grew up in need himself—so bereft of funds that while working his way through college, he would run out of money by the end of each week and have to drink vast amounts of water to endure his hunger until Monday morning, when his meal plan at school could carry him. Later, he made a promise to God that if he would help him become a doctor, he would never charge anyone who could not pay.

He kept that promise, never forgetting what it was to need provision, and what it was to provide. Healing was his ministry, and in it, he was a master.

That Christmas, he made sure an old, dying man got everything he needed. And when the old man told him, fearfully—that he had no money—that he couldn’t pay for all of this—my father simply said—you don’t need any money. I will provide.”

Because Roy had known hunger, need, he let that widen his life and his commitment.

Perhaps this is the great faith journey for all of us.

Not to pretend that the storm is not there.

Not to pretend that we are never afraid.

Not to pretend we are never hungry.

But to speak to the chaos in response, and use all of it as a way to enlarge our hearts.

In the wind,

In the storm,

In the torrent.

We didn't choose it.

We can't stop it.

But we can let it enlarge us.

So today, be mal-adjusted to what is wrong in the world.

Be mal-adjusted to Juneteenth being a federal holiday but at the same time voting rights are being gutted.....

Be mal-adjusted to the immigrants who served, sacrificed, and worked through COVID as essential workers and yet have no pathway to citizenship in this country.

Be mal-adjusted to a budget where there is always money for war but not for rebuilding people's lives afterwards.

Be mal-adjusted to messages that say this country has to have higher walls and fewer languages spoken.

Be mal-adjusted to people having to put off medical care because they cannot afford it.

And let this mal-adjustment be part of your faith.

Speak to the chaos. Speak with letters and action and commitment.

And then, let your heart be enlarged because of what you have felt, seen, heard experienced in your own life.

Because you have felt the wind burn your face during a storm, meet another person in that place.

Because you have known what it is to feel lonely, crack loneliness for someone else.

Because you have known what it is to find your way back, go out to someone who is still out there.

Let your heart enlarge to hold more.

Richard Blanco was the inaugural poet for Barak Obama, and describes his life in three countries as "made in Cuba, assembled in Spain, imported to the USA."

His poem “One Today” reminds us that as we travel across places of chaos, as we travel between one shore of being and another, we do so together under one sky.

Blanco writes,

“One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes  
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather  
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love  
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother  
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father  
who couldn’t give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight  
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,  
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon  
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop  
and every window, of one country—all of us—  
facing the stars  
hope—a new constellation  
waiting for us to map it,  
waiting for us to name it—together.”

Waiting for us to map it.  
Waiting for us to name it together.  
So have faith.  
Have faith.  
Let your heart become larger.  
It’s about all of us, in this boat,  
Under one sky,  
Together.

Benediction:

Saint Bonaventure said, “God is the One whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.” So go now into this day to meet the God who is everywhere. Amen

