

“Why Are You Afraid”
Psalm 133
Mark 4:35-41
BAPC – 20 June 2021

Jesus had spent a **long** day teaching a crowd of people who’d come to him somewhere alongside of the Sea of Galilee – **instructing** those who’d gathered to hear his simple, striking parables. And when he was done for the day and the evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, *Let us go across... to the other side.*

Let **us** go... you and I **together**... across... to the other side.

On another occasion, Christ had sent his disciples off in a boat **without** him; and then he came walking across the water to join them. But **this** time, Christ wanted to set off **with** them... to make the **whole** trip across the Lake together with them. So, Mark tells us, **leaving** the crowd **behind**, they **took** him *just as he was* – meaning **what**? Well, he **was wanting** to go across to the other side with them. We know that, at the very least. And, it’s likely he **was tired** after his long day’s labor. For soon he was asleep on the cushion in the stern. Mark also lets us know that *other boats were with him*. With **him** – not with **them** – which is what we might have **expected** Mark to write. With him. Meaning **what**? **What** other boats were accompanying Christ? Or, what boats was he carrying along in his heart as he came and went and prayed and dreamed? Perhaps the SS Bon Air?!

I may have mentioned this **already** one Sunday. (I don’t remember!) One of the books Ann and I **most** enjoyed reading to our children (and ourselves) years ago was Kenneth Grahame’s The Wind in the Willows. It’s a story with a cast of delightful little animals, **including** Mole and Rat, who become fast friends.

One day, Rat **enticed** Mole to climb into his boat... and off they went, rowing up the river together. As they traveled, they talked, discussing nautical things and life in general. Life was **good**, they agreed, particularly on the water.

*Believe me, my young friend, Ratty declared – There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much **worth doing** as simply messing about in boats!*

So, what do **you** say... as **we** go sailing along in the SS Bon Air? Do you agree with Ratty? **Is** this very much **worth doing**?

But **then**, Mark writes, *a **great** windstorm arose...* churning waves so large they beat into the boat... swamping the boat and panicking the disciples... who, seeing Jesus **asleep** in the stern, woke him **up** by crying **out** (and you can hear the irritation in their words), *Teacher! – do you **not care** that we are perishing?!*

Do you **know** how it is when you're **deep** asleep... and someone yells for you to wake up? It's like you're being **pulled** up through water. ***What was that? What did they say? Do I not **care**? Why did they say that? What do they mean, we are perishing?***

The disciples, Mark tells us, **woke** Jesus up. They **started** the process, anyway. But then Jesus seems to have taken over **himself**, because, Mark tells us a **second** time... that *He woke up...* although, it's worth **noting** that the sentence **goes on**. Mark **tells** us *He woke up... and rebuked the wind* – “Hey **wind!** Pay attention! That's enough.” *And, he said to the sea, “Peace, be still!”* Then, the wind ceased, and there a dead calm descended on the water. And in **that space**, with wind and waves suspended and the disciples **thinking**... *What just happened?...* Jesus began to teach them.

It was one of those “teachable moments” for them; and, **expert** teacher that he was, Christ used a **question** to lead them toward an insight. *Why are you **afraid**?* Jesus asked. **Not** why **were** you, but *why **are** you*. He **knew** they **were** still afraid. And he understood **why**. And he wanted **them** to understand, as well. So, he asked them, Why are you **now** afraid... **now** that the wind and waves have been stilled? *Have you still **no** faith?*

I don't believe Christ **thought** they **had** no faith. I think he knew they had **some** faith, **some** trust; and he was trying to **help** them acknowledge and claim it. He was trying to **help** them **use** the faith they **had**... to exercise it... live out of the energy and peace that it could bring them. Have you still no faith?

I **do**, Teacher. I have **some** faith. I do **believe**. **Help** my unbelief.

And, Mark tells us, *they were **filled** with great **awe***. And **therefore**, can't we assume that they were **emptied** of their fear? Really, they couldn't have been **full** of awe if they were even a **little** inflated by fear!

Seeing that even wind and sea obeyed Jesus, they wondered among themselves, *Who then is this?* The Holy One himself?! And probably also, they **wondered**: And why does **he** want **us** to journey **with him**, to cross with him to the other side? **Why** does **he** want to rescue and preserve **us**... to teach and stretch us... to bless and care for us... and to **use us** in helping him reach others? **Why?**

Surely these are questions **you and I** could be asking in light of this story. Could it be it's because he loves us? I believe that he does. I have **some** faith that he does... a **measure** of faith that he has planted within me. And I **understand** now, **because** of this story, that the faith Christ has given me is a gift I am **meant to draw upon**... to use... **when** the wind rises and the waves threaten.

When the wind and waves threaten and **incline me** to fear... to act **out** of fear... I can **let myself be** spun up in fear... **or**, I can **draw upon the faith** he has given me and, like the wind and the waves he spoke to, I can be stilled; I can be calmed.

And what about **you**? Have **you no** faith from Christ to draw upon? Consider **who** has **called** you, friends... and the **authority** he has... and the **love**. Think how he has borne with you and preserved you. Consider all that he has promised you... and all his reassuring words:

I am with you **always**; and where I am, there you will be!
Abide in me as I abide in you – those who abide in me bear much fruit!

Have you **still** no faith? Surely, you have **some**! And even if it's **as small** as a mustard seed, it should be **more** than enough to still you in the storms. But if you are unsure of that... if you're fragile or tired and you sense the wind rising... **these** friends in **faith** will lend **their** help to you!

One of the saints of Westminster Church... a woman who'd nurtured several generations of youngsters and young parents in Christian faith and living... a longtime elder... a true pillar of the church – you know the type – one year suffered a series of grave losses and challenges. Along the **way**, she faithfully **continued** to participate in the work of the church's **prayer** group, which she'd started. It was a vital, life-giving ministry, not only for **her** but for many who were sustained through its service. And then, when she was diagnosed with cancer and had begun a hard course of treatment, her husband died. It was a perfect, terrible storm for her. And **as** it blew, there came a day when she **confided** to her two closest friends that she was no longer **able** to pray. *I don't have it in me now*, she said. **You** will have to do it **for** me. And they did, they and the others of Westminster Church.

They prayed **her** prayers **for** her... on her behalf... for months and months and months... until the day **came** when she was ready, finally, to resume her praying, herself... once again in the midst of her beloved community.

Is this not **why** is it so good and pleasant when kindred live together in unity... in Christ?

I dare say that all of us have been drawn and **accompanied** by Christ on journeys **across** to any **number** of other sides – both as individuals and as a congregation. Some of those journeys have **concluded**... some are now underway... and some are yet to come for us. God knows, the crossings do sometimes involve strong winds, high waves, hard bailing and uncertainty. But keep your eyes on Jesus. They are actually his journeys that he has asked us to join him on. And the destinations are those he has chosen to take us to... always in his company. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

And if... or when... you start to feel **afraid**, **find** the faith that he has planted deep within you to reassure and help you on these crossings. Or find it in one of your shipmates and allow it to steady and still you both until you reach the other shore... where you and Christ together will rejoice when you make landfall and begin to find whatever new life and ministry he has waiting there in store for you... to fill your life with meaning.