

**Theme:** Jesus is in the boat with us, not saving us FROM the storms but IN the storms of life.

**Scripture:** *And the disciples cried out: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"* (Mark 4:38b)

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This is a great story because great stories are not only *about* life; the *are* life. Sometimes “wind and waves” assault us from within when we fear disapproval, rejection, failure, meaninglessness. And sometimes those assaults come from without. We may have watched or experienced the break-down of a once-loving relationship in a family or a marriage; we may have watched disease rack the body of someone we love or experienced an unexpected medical crisis ourselves; many of us have lost a loved one to death and the grief we experienced was overwhelming. Who among us has not at some time faced a storm in our life where we felt like we were going to drown?

When this happens, do we not also rail against heaven as did the disciples in the boat with Jesus, crying out: *“Do you not care that we are perishing?”* When we face grave danger or some crisis in our lives, our natural human reaction is to wonder whether or not there is a God, and, if so, whether that God is really aware of our situation. So like the disciples we too cry out, *“Don’t you care . . .?”* The question may be voiced in different words, but bottom-line, most of us will, at some time or other, call out: *“Why me, Lord? . . . Don’t you care...?”* And when we cry out, are we not trying to wake God up even as the disciples tried to wake Jesus up?

A while back I was leading a bible study on this particular passage of scripture. I commented that the land-lubber Jesus didn’t seem at all concerned, while the professional fisherman among the disciples who had been fishing this lake forever became terrified. Seemed like an ironic scene to me. But then a retired navy captain commented that this was how he could tell just how bad the storm really was: those who knew the lake fully understood the reality of the situation they were in – it was serious, beyond their control; they were about to drown and they knew it!!

As I said a moment ago, this story of the disciples floundering in the boat is not just about life; it is life. So what can we learn about our lives from this story?

**First**, this story is clear that following Jesus does not mean a storm-free existence. Christ does not save us **FROM** the storms of life; but Christ may indeed save us **IN** the storms of life. Jesus doesn’t stand on the seashore shouting to his disciples to try harder, to row faster, or to make wiser decisions. In fact, you might recall that it was Jesus who had told the disciples to get into the boat in the first place and cross to the other side of the lake. And this request of Jesus probably raised a few eyebrows to begin with as crossing over to the other side would take those disciples into foreign, Gentile territory. But now, before they even arrive at the other side, the storm descends upon them out there in the middle of the sea. But Jesus is not standing on the shoreline but right there in the boat **with them** in the middle of that storm. And this means that when storms strike us, we can trust that Jesus is right there with us as well – both in our individual lives and in our community life together.

**Second**, this story tells us how to live through whatever storms come and how to get to the other side. Certainly, there are some things in life that we can change by sheer will power: we can change a flat tire or the arrangement of furniture in our homes; we can change a reservation or change our schedules; we can even choose to change our jobs. But sometimes, situations arise that will not respond to any of our efforts – no matter how hard we struggle; no matter how hard we work; no matter how many wise decisions we make! Like the disciples in the boat we get caught in the storm and no matter how hard try to change things by rowing harder or bailing faster, the situation only gets worse as the “storm” surrounds us, beats us down, and fills our boat with water.

But hopefully, by God’s grace, that very experience may cause us to do exactly what the disciples did. They cried out to God, “*Do you not care that we are perishing?*” or “*Why me, Lord?*” This isn’t a nice, neat prayer with beautiful flowing language but an angry cry of desperation. It’s a life or death scream for help. And the disciples scream it at Jesus: “*Do you not care that we are perishing?*” This is not a “Sweet Hour of Prayer” kind of prayer, **but it is still prayer**. And that is perhaps one of the things we need to remember from this story: that we too can cry out in desperation to Jesus who is right there with us in the boat!

Crying out with this kind of prayer often opens a wide, 4-lane-wide highway to God. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke<sup>1</sup> once suggested that, when questions tear at our hearts, we should try to love the question. Loving questions like “*Why me?*” or “*Do you not care, Lord?*” means exploring it, turning it this way and that, and struggling with it. In so doing, the very question becomes an avenue to God. It becomes a road whereby we can discover who we are; a path whereby we can learn that much of life is unmanageable despite our efforts; a route wherein we acknowledge that maybe we can’t, but maybe Jesus can. That’s what the disciples discovered in the boat. They began with the question, “*Don’t you care ...?*” They couldn’t calm the wind and waves, but they are not alone in the boat; Jesus is right there with them. And as they turn to Jesus with their question, “*Don’t you care...?*” the question changes to a new question: “*Who then is this...?*”

*(At this point, I inserted a story of my personal experience with a medical crisis and the prayer of a church council. But this story is not for publication on the web.)*

In the Old Testament, Job learned this very lesson. If you remember the story of Job, you will recall that Job had experienced a multitude of tragedies, one right after another: marauders stole all his cattle, sheep, camels; then a natural disaster hit the house where his children were having dinner, killing everyone; Job himself became deathly ill, with sores covering his body. Job has lost everything – possessions, family, and his personal health – and he too cries out, “WHY?” Like the disciples, Job is asking the heavy questions. He rants and he raves: “*Why me, Lord? What have I done?*” But Job directs these questions directly **to** God, unlike some friends who supposedly come to console him. The friends are content to talk **about** God and even lecture Job, so convinced are they that nothing bad would have happened to Job unless he had done something terribly wrong. But these “friends” never pray to God directly on Job’s behalf. They are much more interested in convincing Job of their theological orthodoxy than in being a friend to Job.

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<sup>1</sup> 1875-1926 – German poet whose verse, often marked by a mystic lyricism and precise imagery, profoundly influenced 20th-century German literature. His collections include *The Book of Hours* (1905) and *The Duino Elegies* (1923).

But Job cries out to God directly and, as a result God interacts with Job face-to-face. God answers Job directly “*out of the whirlwind . . .*” the first scripture reading today. “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*” God asks Job. Though this answer may not have answered Job’s question as to “why bad things happen to good people,” Job, nonetheless, is transformed through this interaction with God. He realizes that God is the creator-sovereign of all things, and, after God speaks to him, he moves from a false relationship based on some mental conception he’s had about God to “a relationship of personal trust and surrender.” So at the end of the story we find Job proclaiming: “*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you . . .*” (Job 42:5 [NRSV]). By struggling with the difficult questions and calling out to God even in the midst of his despair, Job is transformed. He is not saved **FROM** the storms of life; but God indeed saves him **IN** the midst of the storm, and Job is enabled to rise above the terrible circumstances of his life as he enters into a deeper relationship with God Almighty.

So don’t be afraid to ask and grapple with the difficult question, “*Why?*” The question itself can be an avenue to God. Love the question; ponder it. If we do so, we too will discover Jesus in the boat with us in the midst of the storm. And we too will find our questions transformed from “*Do you not care...?*” into “*Who then is this...?*”

As a practical application of this, I encourage you to look carefully at the *Taking Faith Home* insert in your bulletin today and to do the activity suggested in the Devotional Section.

1. *Read:* Mark 4:35-41 and Psalm 107:28-31.
2. *Find a container to represent a boat.* Talk about or reflect on any worries or fears you may have today. Write these down and place them in your “boat.” Pray that Jesus will calm your fears and help you to see and trust that he is with you in every storm, especially the worries and fears named in your “boat” today. This is one way to both “love the question” and open up that highway to God.
3. *Then Pray: **God of creation and salvation, help us to see the storms before us, weather the storms within us, and seek shelter in the harbor of your safety and care. We pray to you through Jesus Christ who knows us, cares for us, and saves us. Amen.***
4. Then see what happens!

**Hymn of the Day: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less***

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