

Calming the Storm

August 13, 2023
Matthew 14:22-33

Prayer: God of ancient story and present moment may the words I offer in reflection, be acceptable to you and echo your wisdom in our time. Amen

I was watching the news the other night and I could hardly believe my eyes. A huge wildfire was consuming the beautiful island of Maui. As of this morning at least 95 people have lost their lives and a thousand people are missing, thousands more have been displaced, homes and businesses have also been destroyed.

Coverage of a memorial service came next, for a young man, Zak Muise, who died while fighting the Donnie Creek Fire in Northeast BC. Zak was the second young person to die while fighting fires in our country, the first was Devyn Gale, she died while fighting a fire near Revelstoke.

Then the news flipped from devastation to the ridiculous yet still disturbing. It was reported that our prime minister Justin Trudeau who took his 15 year old son Xavier to the Barbie movie, while wearing pink, has received hateful responses, particularly homophobic ones. And did you know Taylor Swift is saving the economy. Not the bank of Canada or other world financial institutions no - Taylor Swift is fixing economies as she tours.

Storms in our world rage.

Forty four communities in Saskatoon have unhoused folks living in makeshift dwellings. Use of the Food Bank and learning centre continues to increase and without school feeding programs over the summer, many kids are going hungry. When I drove my Dad to St. Paul's hospital Thursday morning for a minor procedure we both noticed several folks wrapped in plastic bags sitting in the ally waiting for the Prairie Harm Reduction facility to open.

Storms in our community rage.

Health concerns, economic challenges, work stress, separations, divorce, loneliness, and so much more.

Storms in our lives rage.

Matthew's gospel lesson today speaks about storms.

Matthew tells us of a very difficult moment in the lives of the disciples and a very literal storm that they must navigate. The story begins by telling us that Jesus sent them out onto the water by themselves. Things were getting stormy on the land. Thousands were gathering around Jesus and his disciples, as Jesus was gaining popularity the authorities were feeling threatened; the situation was becoming dangerous. Jesus sent the disciples ahead, over the water, to keep them out of harms way. They were safer without him then with him in that moment. Alone, Jesus would have been less of a threat too. Jesus now by himself finds a quiet place to pray.

Matthew tells us that the disciples, who got into the boat, to go to the other side without Jesus did not have a smooth trip. In fact, their small boat is battered by waves. Matthew says that the wind was against the boat.

At the beginning of the story we are told that this whole episode started when it was evening, so by the time Jesus shows up the disciples have been enduring the

waves and the wind and the darkness for several hours at least. If you have had to bail water, against the wind and hold on for dear life, hour after hour, in the dark, my hunch is you might be exhausted. And now as if the wind, and the water, and the waves, and the exhaustion, and the darkness, and the muscle strain, were not enough now they have to deal with a ghost - something or someone coming toward them on the wild sea.

Matthew tells us they were terrified, and they cried out in fear. That is what I would do, wouldn't you? The disciples in that boat were practical people, they looked at the storm, they saw the mess they were in, the danger, they recognize that they were in trouble, and they were terrified.

We can relate.

I think Peter in the story, gives us insight as to how to respond when we become frightened by our world or the storms of our lives. Jesus was walking toward them on the water and as he gets closer he calls out to them "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." And Peter calls back, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water".

Peter does **not do** what I probably would have done in that situation you see when my life is a mess, when the storms of this world threaten and frighten me I usually pray something like this - where are you God, come and help me - and then I kind of wait for God to come to where I am. If I had been in that boat, I probably would have shouted this kind of prayer: "Jesus get yourself over here and sit down in this boat with us and save us". And I probably would have added – "after all you sent us out in this boat in the first place and you let us struggle for hours in the dark while you had your prayer time, so get yourself over here and save us Amen." In my panic that's probably how I would have prayed, that is probably what I would have said. But Peter does not say "Jesus come to me and help me." What Peter says is "Lord if it's you - command **me to come to you**".

Did you catch the difference?

Peter does not ask Jesus to come any closer - rather Peter says to Jesus tell me to come closer to you and Jesus says, "come". Peter gets out of the boat and he draws closer to Jesus and in that moment - **here's the key** –

it is the command of Jesus and the response of Peter which shows us how to address our fears. Peter in effect, is saying to Jesus, just tell me to come closer to you. And once he hears Jesus invitation - Peter gets closer – by doing what Jesus is doing.

Peter understood that the way to overcome this fearful situation was to move toward Jesus and to do what Jesus was doing - walking on the water. Peter did not wait for Jesus to come over and sit down beside him in the boat rather Peter understood that if he wanted to move beyond the boat – the storm – the fear - he would have to get up and move toward Jesus, doing what Jesus was doing.

There are lots of storms brewing in our world and like Peter we can make a Jesus centred decision, that fear is not going to control us, and exhaustion is not going to constrain us. That the darkness is not going to dictate our behavior. We do not have to hide passively in the boat waiting for things to change. **Rather** we can listen to Jesus' call to come. And we can move past the storm if we do what Jesus is doing. For Peter that meant leaving the security of the boat and walking on the water.

I think that the storms in our life will only be overcome if we are willing to draw nearer to Jesus and we will draw nearer to Jesus by doing what Jesus does.

For some of us it might mean that we finally forgive, because that's what Jesus does, he forgives.

It might mean we become more generous because Jesus was generous.

It might mean that that we finally respect each person because Jesus did. It might mean we really do pray for and love our enemies because that's what Jesus did.

That we welcome the stranger and the little child because Jesus did that. We serve justice rather than serving any worldly gain because that's what we saw Jesus doing.

How do we break the power of the storm and our fear? We do what Jesus did, feed the hungry because that's what he did.

Breakdown barriers because Jesus did.

Pray because Jesus prayed.

Step out in faith and risk everything in order to stay faithful - Jesus certainly did.

Open your arms wide with compassion - after all Jesus did.

Speak the truth - that's what Jesus did.

Sarah's son was killed in a farming accident, and her heart shattered into pieces. Her grief was overwhelming and she found each day brought more pain and suffering. One afternoon, in desperation she went to see her friend Hazel.

What can I do – this pain is too much for me – everyone around me goes about their day with out any worries – but from the moment I get up in the morning until I fall asleep at night I am rocked with grief.

Hazel, a wise woman, told Sarah that she had read somewhere that if you were able to get a mustard seed from the home of someone who has never known sorrow, your grief and your pain would go away.

Immediately Sarah set out in search of the magic mustard seed. First, she visited the home of a wealthy family, she thought tragedy is less likely to strike them. Soon she approached a beautiful home, knocked on the door and spoke to the man who greeted her. She told him she was in search of a home that has never known sorrow and she wondered if his home was such a home. Tears began to form in the man's eyes. Together they sat on the front porch and the man shared his struggles and grief with Sarah – Sarah listened with great care and compassion. After several hours Sarah left to continue her search for the magic mustard seed.

Next, she chose a more modest home. But the experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to tiny home, she was greeted with tales of struggle and sorrow. Everyone found her a willing and careful listener.

After months of travel, she became so involved in caring for others that her own grief, though still present, no longer overwhelmed her as it had in the beginning. Sarah never did find the magic mustard seed but living with compassion changed everything. Living with compassion is a Jesus thing.

There are thousands of stories, of people who lived in troubled and stormy times but instead of letting the waves overwhelm them, like Peter they got up and moved toward Jesus – by doing what Jesus did.

You recall I told you that I drove past Prairie Harm reduction this past week. And that I witnessed people sitting in the ally, wrapped in plastic bags because of the rain, waiting for the facility to open. Well the next morning, I came into the office and saw with new eyes the great pile of coffee supplies, toiletries and toys that you had gathered to support and care for those struggling with addiction. I got to thinking that sometimes

we – here at McClure - are very much like Peter. We are in the storm but when we move toward Jesus and do what Jesus would do - there is hope.

Now, remember Peter got up and he got going toward Jesus – but he had a bit of trouble on the way – remember when he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked only at the storm he began to sink like a rock. Friends lets stop staring at the storm and let us move toward Jesus and lets do what Jesus did.

I believe that then and only then will the storms calm.

Amen

Rev. Debra Berg