



**TOUCH POINT**

## Boat Rides and Roller Coasters – Touchpoint for June 19, 2024

### Mark 4:35-41 (NRSVUE) Jesus Stills a Storm

<sup>35</sup> On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. <sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” <sup>39</sup> And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Be silent! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

**Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**



I think I'd be with the disciples on a better question for Jesus: “Jesus, how can you snooze when we are in a storm and about to capsized?”

You know what? I get this! There have been times that I have felt as if I was on a boat getting ready to drown in stormy, overwhelming circumstances.

But it seems a bit much to judge a person's faith on a capsizing boat during a storm. Jesus's words remind me of a lot of church people I've been around who say, “Just have enough faith. Everything's gonna be okay.” Yup, never helped.

Rembrandt painted a masterpiece in 1633 depicting the event called, “Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee”. It is said he painted himself into the picture imagining the personal experiences.

I had a friend and cohort in ministry named John Lynch who did a beautiful reflection on this

magnificent Rembrandt painting, exploring the individual experiences and their relationship with Jesus.

John encouraged us to look at each person on the boat and imagine what they might be experiencing in that moment of enormous fear. The immediate reactions included flight, fight and freeze.

In the painting, there are some examples of understandable yet futile reactions. The guy on the left is grasping a rope that clearly is not attached to anything. Below him, one dude thinks he is strong enough to hold the sail down around the base of the mast. Keep in mind this storm was a squall. Not even the greatest surfers in the world would take on those massive waves. One guy forgot his Dramamine, and another is just curled up in a blanket giving into a warmer death.

I can relate to all of them!

Like the last guy, there's been a time or two when I just dropped my shoulders thinking, 'Well it's over, I might as well just accept the inevitable.' Before the feeling of impending doom however, I may take on one of the other boaters' reactions. Reacting to the danger, rather than to the Spirit who could provide me with inner wisdom and clarity. My fear clouds reality and I spend all my energy on futile, misguided efforts.

As we gaze into this beautiful Rembrandt masterpiece, maybe we can discover an alternate meaning for Jesus's question for this fellow travelers.

Maybe Jesus is really saying, "I know you're freaked out, but do you remember what I told you before we left the shore? What were the instructions I gave you?"

He said, "Let us get in the boat and go to the other side." Jesus didn't say, "Let's get in a boat, hit a storm halfway, and die." That was their light to follow when in darkness. I heard someone once say, 'When you're in darkness you don't attempt to create your own light; you depend on the light that's been previously revealed.'

The strength, wisdom and resilience that lie within us is nurtured by many moments of intimacy with God prior to an event like this on the boat. Like the process of photosynthesis, many of our reactions are light-dependent. Have we absorbed enough light to make its way to the inner core of our being, the same way it is for a plant that must grow and thrive under stressful circumstances? Using the inner core chemical reactions, the original light source supplies life-giving molecules to outside conditions when needed.

All the important work is done with inside reactions before outside actions. Spiritual practices and contemplation create our inner receptivity to the light in darkness. Light that nourishes our soul and spirit are for these in-the-boat moments.

Jesus said, "Get in the boat and let's go to the other side."

Suppose you're in a storm and the lights in your home go out. There is disorientation. At first a bit of panic, but then we gather and wonder where the candles are. Now we get off the couch and attempt to avoid trips and bumps, remembering and reaching for the furniture. Our level of confidence or panic is equal to our familiarity with our environment. I can't see, but I believe the dining table is here. Then I move to another object and another object until finally I find the place where I keep the candles. I cannot see where I'm going, but I'm relying on my past knowledge when things were illuminated.

It would be silly for us to shout at the darkness, to cry out to God to turn the electricity on. If we did maybe the silent answers to our cries would be, 'Where is your faith?' Perhaps our answers lie in the light that's been previously revealed, lest we attempt to create our own light.

Jesus said, "Where is your faith?"

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the direction of God speaking to us in the light that was previously revealed.

Jesus said, "Get in the boat, and let's go to the other side."

Perhaps there is another way in these situations. Jesus called it faith. If Jesus is referring to faith as a feeling of certainty that everything will be okay, then I'd have to consider myself a disappointment to Jesus. But maybe it's simpler than that. Maybe we're not expected to be thinking up things we never knew.

Maybe we're not supposed to imagine a false narrative, but a narrative we've been given prior to this isolated, powerless event.

I grew up with a paralyzing fear of heights. As a young boy, I missed the view atop Seattle's Space Needle. As the elevator climbed, I faced away from the see-through glass. I survived, but to this day I have no idea what that magnificent view looked like.

I never rode roller coasters... didn't climb walls or jump fences. I was rendered powerless when my friends and I came to a chain-link fence needing to be climbed. I would anxiously scan another way to get around.

As a father with daughters in high school, I decided enough was enough. I'd been a youth leader pretending my group needed a point person drinking coffee in the shade while they rode the roller coasters. It was a necessary but convenient reason to bail out.

In my quest to get over it, I chose to ride one of the scariest roller coasters at Six Flags. It would be my first time and I was in my thirties. My daughter, Kristi, was off with her friends. When they came back to check in, I said, "Hey Kristi! I'm gonna ride a roller coaster and you're going with me and we're gonna ride in the front car!" She couldn't believe it! Being the oldest, she was also a little bit freaked out and protective of my mental state.

We entered the line and shuffled through the slow-moving switchbacks toward the entry, climbing higher and higher until we could see only treetops. Being with Kristi and being the protective father that I was, my fear was tempered. I wasn't gonna turn back. We arrived at the front of the line, standing on the platform. The coaster cars jolted forward and stopped. It was our turn. My heart was beating, and Kristi was laughing, but reassuring me. I sat and pulled the safety arm down. I was sure ours was too loose. I tried to get the attention of the employee shouting, "I don't think mine is locked, hey, I don't think mine is locked!" Kristi is giggling and telling me it'll be okay. I'm laughing too, sort of.

We were getting ready to take off and I could hear the sound of the roller coaster death march. Clang, clang, clang went the car's metal guards on the rail as it inched toward the start. Looking out into the abyss, there was nothing blocking our view from the front. I could see the rail our car rested on. I noticed it ended about 100 feet out. Just ended! I grabbed Kristi's hand and could not get out any words. I wanted to scream, "We're not connected!" As our car took off, all I could see were trees and mountains below. My shoulders dropped and I took my last breath, leaning forward into the direction of my inevitable plunge. We dropped a few feet and unexpectedly we were flying among the trees! We weren't connected on the bottom! We were connected at the top!

It was a fast and smooth ride from there. I felt the wind as we laughed! And yes, I occasionally screamed like a little boy... on a roller coaster.

To this day we retell that story, and it serves as a reminder that I don't really know the reality of my connections during my difficult times. Like me and Kristi, I bet those guys on the boat retold that story and became closer.

Jesus didn't say, "Don't be afraid or panic." He said, "Where is your faith?" Perhaps meaning, "What did I tell you to do when we were on shore? I said, 'Let's get in the boat and go to the other side.'"

Jesus didn't say, "Let's get in a boat, get halfway, hit the worst storm ever, and feel like you're going to die. Any takers?" Who is going to say, "Count me in!"?

When I am facing dark moments, this tells me I must rely on the light that has been previously revealed. It's best not to attempt to create my own light. Rather, depend on the light that has been previously revealed.

In *How to Walk in the Dark*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "The real problem has far less to do with what is really out there than it does with our resistance to finding out what is really out there."

God has every intention of taking us to the other side. Look at the view from the top. Take it all in. When it's a bit overwhelming, remember where we are connected. We can remember that God has every intention to take us to the other side of any storm.

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

### **You, Lord, Are in This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You, Lord, are in 1)...this place. 2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it. Your presence is peace.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **In the Arms of God**

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear.

Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear.

For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

*Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains.

God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care.

God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

## The Meal

### **The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

### **Benediction**

### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)