

January 28, 2018

*“Running Against the Wind”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Mark 4:35-41

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As I thought about today's scripture, I was reminded of a modern day illustration that speaks to the storms we face in life. How many of you remember that wonderful movie *Forrest Gump*? I think this movie has resonated with us over the years, because in so many ways, we wish we could be more like him. No matter what the issues or difficulties he faced, somehow he had the inner strength and resilience to overcome them all. Just look at all the storms that came his way. He was born with a physical deformity and had to wear leg braces. He had no father. He was relatively poor. He was mentally challenged. The other kids bullied him. He had to go to war in Vietnam where his friend Bubba was killed, and Capt. Dan's legs were blown off. And yet he was able to get through those storms by always having a positive outlook on life. But at one point, after he lost the girl he loved, Jenny, to drugs and a wayward lifestyle, the movie symbolically depicts Forrest running away from his past and his problems. We can identify with that, right? And he runs and he runs. Let's watch.

Video of Forrest Gump <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKKmzmeU5-0> (edited)

As we watched Forrest run, those lyrics from Bob Seger's song, *Running Against the Wind*, that overlaid the video hit home as well, didn't they? Because they, too, are words we can all identify with. “I found myself further and further from home. I lost my way. There are, oh, so many roads. I was running against the wind, running against the wind.” For me, when I hear that, I think of fighting the wind of the Holy Spirit, which is never a good idea! But then the song goes on, offering a glimmer of hope... I began to find myself searching... searching for shelter.” And Forrest Gump finally stops running and begins to walk... back home again.

Yes, we've all been there. We've all tried to run away from our problems, we've all lost our way at times, taken the wrong road, broken some rules, and found ourselves in places and positions where we didn't want to be. We might even be there now – running against the wind, against the storms raging in our lives. Bad decisions have come back to haunt us, sickness has arrived uninvited, relationships have crumbled, sorrow has invaded, failure has struck. And now we're searching for shelter, relief from the storm. Well, the good news in today's Gospel reading, is that shelter is found in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and his words, “Peace! Be still. Why are you afraid?” “Peace! Be still. Why are you afraid?”

Let's look further at the Scripture. Now at first, we might think this miracle is unique to those disciples on that day they were sailing across the Sea of Galilee. I'm sure some of us here have been out on the open sea, with the wind blowing and the waves crashing over the boat, and as you look down into the dark swirling waters, a real fear can begin to rise up in you, and you would welcome a miracle like that! And for you who are not sailors, I'm sure there have been times where you've experienced fear that is analogous to the wind blowing against you, waves crashing over you, and you have no control over what's happening. So you can imagine what relief that miracle might bring. But listen again to Jesus' words, "Why are you afraid?" Those words speak to something more, something profound, something greater. You see, the real miracle is not Jesus calming the storm that raged around the disciples. No. The real miracle is all about Jesus calming the disciples in the midst of the storm. Let me repeat. The real miracle is not Jesus calming the storm around the disciples, it is Jesus calming the disciples in the midst of the storm. And just think what that means for us. That there is no storm in our lives too fierce, no opponent too great, no crisis too severe, that Jesus' words and promises can't calm us. "Peace! Be still. Do not be afraid." We are to claim this miracle for ourselves as well.

For we have a God, through Jesus Christ, who not only loves us, but tells us in no uncertain terms that he will always be with us. The Bible tells us time and time again, "Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God." "When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned." We hear Jesus say, "I am with you always, even until the end of the age." These are the promises of God. The question is - do we believe them? The fact is that only those with little faith cry out for calm waters - "Help me!" Great faith rests in God and rides out the storm. My guess is that after this incident, the disciples asked themselves how they could ever have thought that Christ would let them drown. And so it with us. Can we have the faith that trusts - that if we fail now, God can and will bring us greater success in his timing. That though we suffer and feel broken, God will bring us to greater wholeness. That though the realities of life can bring us down, God will lift us higher. Even that, though we will die, we will enter in to life everlasting. When we put our faith and trust in God, it honors God, and he showers us with his good graces. So we need to ask ourselves - do we have faith and trust that God can and will calm those storms in our lives? Listen to Jesus saying to you, to each and every one of us, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and facing storms in your lives and running against the wind. And I will give you rest and shelter. I will give you the strength, and the peace, to overcome the world."

Let me close with a true story of someone who found God's rest and shelter in the midst of his storms. John Fountain is a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois. In the NPR series, "This I Believe," he writes, "I believe in God. Not some cosmic, intangible, spirit-in-the-sky, God. But a God who embraced me when my father disappeared from my life at age four, the police leading him away from our front door, down the stairs in handcuffs. The God who warmed me when we could see our breath inside our freezing apartment, and there was no food, no hot water and little hope. The God who held my hand when I witnessed boys in my 'hood swallowed by the elements and by death; the God who claimed me when I felt like "no-man's son." The God who allowed me to feel His presence whenever I found myself in the tempest of life's storms, telling me, even when I was told I was nothing, that I was something, and that I was His. It wasn't until many years later, standing over my father's grave for a long overdue conversation, that my tears flowed. I told him about the man I had become. I told him about how much I wished he had been a father in my life. And, how, in his absence, I had found another. Or that He — God, the Father, God, my Father — had found me. And that calmed me and I knew I never needed to be afraid.

Today's gospel story gives testimony to the fact that the boat in which Jesus and his disciples found themselves in went through a real storm, a real threat, just like the ones we face. The storm doesn't blow around their boat just because Jesus is on board. It hits them full force. And nowhere does Jesus promise his followers anything different. In this difficult and imperfect world, we are going to be in for some rough times. A peaceful voyage is not the ticket Christians travel on. But a peace-filled journey, with Christ always present, is assured. So when those storms of life hit you, remember that Jesus does not promise to calm every storm in your life, but Jesus does promise to calm you in every storm of life with those words, "Peace! Be still. Do not be afraid." Amen.