

“Let’s Go Across to the Other Side”
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 21, 2015
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Holy Scriptures: Mark 4: 35-41

Mark 4: 35-41 (NRSV)

Jesus Stills a Storm

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ 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?” ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Sermon

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them,
“Let us go across to the other side.”
And leaving the crowd behind,
they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.*

“Let’s go across to the other side.”

Jesus said this to his followers before they got into the boat.
“The disciples are about to go on a trip,

and it is not one of their own choosing.
This one is at Jesus' command." [1]

“Let's go across to the other side.”

Let's go together, God and God's people, united in the same boat,
over the sea, over the divide, over into the unknown,
overcoming fears,
sailing with faith and hope to a common destination.

So the disciples followed Jesus of Nazareth into the boat.
This was the same boat prepared for Jesus as shared in Mark 3.
Jesus told his disciples to have a boat ready for him
because he had cured so many people and cast out so many
demons
that the crowds were pressing in.

This is the same boat he stood up in
to teach people seated on the beach. (Mark 4)

This same boat was used on four crossings of the Sea of Galilee.

In the first trip they encountered on the other side the Gerasene
Demoniac. (Mark 5)
When they sailed back they were welcomed by Jarius,
who prayed at Jesus' feet that God might heal his daughter.
(Mark 5)

On another journey they sailed to Bethsaida,
where Jesus went up a mountain to pray. (Mark 6)

In yet another trip, after Jesus fed 5,000 people with twelve loaves
and five fish,
they sailed back to Bethsaida, where Jesus cured a blind man.
(Mark 8)

Clearly, my friends, to cross the Sea of Galilee
means one intentionally must overcome the boundary
that divides Jewish towns on the West and Gentile
towns on the East.

They sailed over the sea that isolated Hebrew people from those who
were not.

There is more at work here than meets the eye.
The Sea of Galilee is also a symbolic boundary.
When God moves from one people to another,
 when the Lord calls the whole people of God to leave behind
the familiar
 in order to venture into new territory, new
relationships, new adventures,
 God is guiding followers to cross social
barriers.

Crossing social boundaries and cultural and religious divides
 is as difficult as anything we can imagine.
So often we find that this is cause of either great anxiety or delightful
tranquility,
 either forming fear of the unknown or faith formation into
God's own.

“Let's go across to the other side.”

The Disciples are about to go on a trip, only this one is not one of
their choosing.

The Son of God settles in for a well-deserved nap,
 nestled in with the cushions in the bottom of the boat.
Soon a strong wind arises and the seas rage and roar,
 tossing the boat to and fro.
*37 ...and the waves beat into the boat,
so that the boat was already being swamped.*

*38 But Jesus 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?”*

Bless their hearts, the Disciples behave as if they are alone.
Dazed and confused,
 they behave as if they have forgotten
 that the Son of God is in the boat with them
We can well imagine them staring at the windswept sea and saying,
“Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy!”
God did.

God does.
God always will.

“Let’s go across to the other side.”

Jesus is asleep, calm and comfortable, at ease and unafraid.

Does this remind you of the story of the farmer who hired a new farmhand?

Farmer gave the new farmhand a long list of chores
that needed to be done before nightfall and the threatening
skies.

That night a great storm arose; wind and rain lashed the barn and
crops in the field.

Farmer was worried that something was amiss, and went outside to
check.

The gates were closed and locked.

The cattle were in their stalls with food and water.

The tools were put away, each in their proper space.

All doors and shutters were secure.

The farmer finally found the farmhand snoring loudly, sound asleep
in the hay,

content because he had done all that could be done.

He slept while the storm raged because he was secure in his faith and
his good works.

Do not be afraid!

Not because there is nothing to fear; do not fear because Jesus is with
you.

You are not alone, so don’t be afraid.

New journeys will arise; sudden storms will surprise;
yet remember that Jesus is with you.

A friend was driving down a side street
when she saw a small group of children around a lemonade
stand.

She pulled over and approached the children.

The hand-drawn sign announced that their product
was fresh squeezed, homemade, ice cold, and only 50 cents a

glass.

She asked the oldest child, who looked around 8, how the lemonade was made.

“Well,” the girl said importantly, “I open the mix and add it to some water

and then put in a few ice cubes and then I carefully stir it. Let me show you.”

At this point she put her arm in the glass pitcher up to her elbow, and began to swirl it around the lemonade.

My friend pulled out a dollar and said, *“I’ll take two.”*

What does cultural wisdom suggest you do when life gives you lemons?

How is that working for you?

Let’s be honest and authentic this morning.

How are you coping with life’s lemons?

Sometimes okay, sometimes not so okay?

I can relate.

What is it like for you to discover that you are about to go on a trip, and it is not one of your own choosing?

And what does the Faith have to say when bad things happen to good folks?

We are to give thanks in all circumstances, rejoice always, and trust that through thick and thin, God is with us.

Yes, indeed!

Jesus Christ was sent by God to walk with us, sail with us, lead us to new ports of call.

To all the storms that quake and shake and rattle our lives, God says, *“Peace! Shalom! Be still!”*

And the Bible is clear – crystal – about God’s love in Christ Jesus from which nothing can separate us.

The Apostle Paul was on fire with inspiration and insight when he pointed out:

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him

who loved us.

*³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers,
³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 35, 37-
39)*

Here we are, connected with the holy and one another,
doing our best by making lemonade out of lemons.
Lord knows our arms are all in the pitcher and we're stirring our
hearts out.

“Let's go across to the other side.”

Ocean liners and great cruise ships, oil tankers and aircraft carriers
share a common challenge:

it takes one or more miles of ocean water to change
direction.

Ships that long require a great deal of time and effort to set a new
course.

Yet once they do, once their course is set
and the ship is aiming for a distant port of call,
it is full steam ahead.

Human communities are much like ocean liners.

It takes a lot of ocean water and time and effort and determination
to adjust course and set a new direction,

a new port of call, a new plan of action.

Yet once we do, it is full steam ahead.

Today the human community is sailing together in this boat
christened Earth.

We've got plenty of lemons yet also all the means necessary for
making lemonade.

We need to work in concert, to put our arms all the way in, together.

When their boat was tossed to and fro,

the disciples saw only the storm clouds that hovered overhead

and forgot who God was, and that Jesus was present
and available.

Let's see with the eyes of faith that God has the power to overcome
whatever befalls us.

Jesus has shown us that we have the power in Christ
to unite our voices and faith and courage to reach the other
side, together.

“Let's go across to the other side.”

Jesus, we are in this boat with you, so please take us to the other side.

Gracious God, liberate us from a land where fear is the norm and faith
an oddity.

Take us to the other side, together, to a Promising Land.

We are not afraid, for You are nigh.

We've seen up close and personal what fear can do to the human soul.

Fear can paralyze.

Fear can undermine.

Fear can zap confidence, feed anger, and overwhelm compassion.

Ever notice that when we are afraid

the first thing to go is care and compassion for “the other” in
our midst?

Faith inspires generosity;

fear feeds the lie that there isn't enough.

Fear insists that there is only room enough for us in the boat;

the first thing tossed overboard is hospitality.

Fear tells the outsider, the alien, the stranger that there is no room in
the inn.

Faith says welcome home.

Jesus, show us how to connect Jewish communities with Gentile
communities,

how to cross over racial divides and see one another as
partners in the same boat,

how to leave behind the economic disparity that
crushes and oppresses,

how to arrive together at a sacred port

where human rights and civil rights

are daily realities for all God's

children.

Lord, lead us together to a new day and a new home where violence is not glorified,

where senseless violence is not accepted as a viable solution to fixing broken homes or damaged relationships or troubled nations,

where your words “Peace! Shalom!” are both a command and a way of life.

Holy Spirit, teach us again what it means to be reconciled, to lower our pride and vainglory that cloud perceptions and understanding,

and help us to hoist the sails of forgiveness and grace.

“Let’s go across to the other side.”

The disciples went on a trip, and it wasn’t one of their own choosing.

This one was at Jesus’ command and call, saying

“Let’s go across to the other side.”

Let’s go across together, God and God’s people, united in the same boat, over the sea, over the divide, over into the unknown, overcoming fears, sailing with faith to a common destination toward a port called Hope.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] Fred Craddock, “Preaching the New Common Lectionary: Year B” 1985, Page 59.