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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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ACTS 12:5-11
MARK 4:35-41

“GOING THROUGH THE STORM”

The main point of this sermon is that a mature faith will equip you to endure the stormy trials we face following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Setting Out

Many of our youth are ending one sports season and transitioning into another, which got me thinking. What does every athlete dread? What always comes at the beginning of the season? *Preseason conditioning*. I think every swim coach I ever had got some sort of secret delight at the beginning of each season when they got prove to us just how out-of-shape some of us had gotten.

No one enjoys preseason workouts. Remember those scenes from *Remember the Titans* when the team travels to Gettysburg College to get ready for the season? Players passing out and losing their lunches. All of them ready to quit. But that’s the point, isn’t it? Every preseason workout is about getting ready for what’s coming. You’ve got to learn how much more work is required.

And before the disciples got on this boat with Jesus, they too had gone through their own conditioning workouts. With Jesus at the lead, the disciples journeyed from town to town as Jesus taught and healed and proclaimed his message. They were never idle but always onto the next assignment. No real downtime. And the one constant wherever they went? *The crowd*. They were always contending with the crowd.

In the first three chapters of Mark’s Gospel, there are five references to the crowd. And so, as the reader, we get this sense from Mark that things were never quiet for the disciples. It’s like they never had a moment to catch their breath or be alone with Jesus.

And so, when Jesus told them they were going across to the other side and leaving the crowd behind, that was probably sweet music to the disciples’ ears. Finally, a little break from the crowd.

Sudden Change

But the respite didn’t come, did it? Instead, this great windstorm came out of nowhere, and waves were beating into the boat, and the boat was filling up with water.

And here’s what really must have gotten under the disciples’ skin: this was Jesus’ idea. He was the one who said, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ He was in charge of the whole operation.

They must have been thinking, ‘We’ve done everything he has asked of us. We’ve left our previous life behind to follow him, and here we are, about to drown.’

And at that moment, when the disciples were soaking wet and fearing for their lives, they looked around, and who did they see in the stern of the boat? Jesus, asleep on the cushion. And imagine what went through their heads. They had seen Jesus heal a man who couldn’t walk. They were there in the synagogue when Jesus who restored a man’s withered hand. They saw Jesus make a leper clean and free another from an unclean spirit.

Sleeping in the Stern

Jesus had done all these things for people who, unlike the disciples, hadn’t left everything to follow him. How unfair, they must have thought. Maybe they said to another, ‘He cared for all those people who didn’t do a thing for him, and here we are, needing his help, and he’s asleep!’

But here’s the problem: the disciples never considered an alternative way to interpret Jesus’ sleep. It escapes them that that maybe Jesus’ peacefulness is evidence that they too, even amid the storm, can have peace. That maybe they are to draw strength from him.

Instead, what happened is that they allowed one incident, one stormy trial, to determine what they believed about Jesus. You see, they *felt* abandoned. And so, what they *felt* become more real to them than what they had come to *know* about Jesus. And because they let those feelings have the dominant place in their hearts, all they had come to know about Jesus was thrown overboard, and they’re left thinking the unthinkable: that Jesus does not care for them.

And so, the windstorm didn’t prove or even suggest that Jesus didn’t care about his disciples. But what we learn is that the disciples hadn’t grown up yet. They were still immature disciples. Because one of the hallmarks of immaturity is the inability to see the bigger picture. When we’re immature we’re captive to the moment and allow the latest feeling to determine *everything*. Nothing’s more real than what’s happening right now to the immature person.

I’ll give you an example. When my brother was in middle school, he was on the basketball team. And whenever they had an away game, the team was required to dress up. They had to wear a shirt and tie and khaki pants. Well, my Dad oversaw the ironing. And one morning my brother came downstairs all dressed up as his coach required, but he was furious.

Why? My Dad had ironed a sharp crease, right down the center of his pants. And of course, for a middle school boy, an ironed crease meant you might as well kiss your social reputation goodbye. Who’s going to be friends with the kid with the ironed khakis? In my brother’s eyes, it was all over at that point. And deep down, he was thinking, ‘Dad, don’t you care? Don’t you care about what happens to me.’ Just like the disciples, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Of course, my Dad cared about my brother. The problem was that my brother, like we all do in our immaturity, let this one incident define his whole reality.

And for the disciples, yes, the storm was real. It appeared threatening. It looked like it was going to overtake them. But what was most important, and what should have brought the disciples peace was that Jesus wasn't threatened by the storm. You notice, Jesus never panicked. He never lost control. He never let the present moment determine what he knew about his Father's love and care for him. Jesus never lost sight of his Father's character. That was the source of his peacefulness. And ours too. Momentary things shouldn't cloud our eyes to God's faithful and loving care. And there's nothing that can derail God's purposes. Nothing that threatens Him and causes Him to panic.

And notice, in the face of the disciples' panic and immaturity, what did Jesus do? He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" He demonstrated his care for them. But it's more than that, isn't it?

Jesus shows us his maturity. Because what do mature people do when confronted with someone's immaturity? They don't throw it back in the person's face. They don't say, 'So, you don't think I care about you. Well, I'll show you just how much I don't care.' They rise above it. They aren't captive to what's right in front of them. They maintain the right perspective. Always seeing the bigger picture.

And we know this about ourselves: we've all acted immaturely before Jesus. We've been selfish and shortsighted. We've said all sorts of things that are wrong. We've thought all number of things that just aren't true. And, like the disciples here, we've probably made false accusations against Jesus.

But Jesus didn't get rid of the disciples, did he? He didn't throw them overboard because of their immaturity. Instead, after quieting the storm, he asked them to think. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" He knew their accusation was unfounded. It had no merit. Jesus knew they stopped thinking.

And you'll hear people say we need to empty our minds in order to think clearly. People tell us to stop thinking too hard and just be. But that's not what Jesus is saying. What he's suggesting is that the disciples got into trouble when they emptied their minds of truth. And the way to grow up and leave your immaturity behind is to do some proper thinking.

And notice how our passage ends. Mark leaves us with a question to answer. "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" All through Mark's Gospel people are struggling with that question. That question is at the heart of all the controversy surrounding Jesus. Who is Jesus? Can he really be who he claims to be? Does he have the authority to forgive sins? Is he really the Messiah? Is he truly the Son of God?

And what we learn about the disciples is that at the end of Jesus' life they hadn't yet *really* figured it out. And so, to the very end, they remained immature disciples. That's why they jumped ship at the end. When their loyalty and trust in Jesus was really tested, they abandoned him. But Jesus didn't throw back in the faces, did he? He remained true to his mission. And he faced greatest storm on his own.

You see, on the cross, Jesus went through the fiercest, most violent storm imaginable, because all the waves of human sin came crashing down on him. He took the full brunt of the storm to shield us. Do you see what happened? On the cross, Jesus lost his peace with the Father. The one who calmed the sea that evening was tossed into the chaos, so we could have peace with God through him (cf. Rom. 5:1). And he did all that, because it was the only way to keep us from perishing. And it was the only way we'd ever grow up and leave our immature thinking behind.

Sleeping in Prison

Isn't it interesting that Peter, one of the disciples who panicked in that windstorm, was asleep in that prison cell? Bound with chains and surrounded by soldiers, waiting his execution, Peter didn't lose his peace. Do you see what happened? Peter grew up. He came to understand the extent to how much Christ cared for his life. And what Christ was willing to pay to secure his eternal peace. And because of that, he was no longer a disciple who feared storms. He was a disciple who took on the character of Christ. That's how Peter reached maturity.

And it was the mature Peter who served Christ faithfully. That Peter made a difference in the life of the church. And that's what I want you to remember as you think about your giving this year. Yes, we are called to contribute to the needs of the church, which include its financial needs. Trinity needs your financial generosity, and through your generosity God does amazing things. But financial gifts are never the difference.

The difference are the disciples who've come to the knowledge that Christ has absorbed all that death could unleash. He took the direct hit, so we could pass through the shadow. That's why Peter could sleep in that prison cell. There was nothing Herod or anyone else or anything in this world that could undo what his Savior had done for him. He didn't fear. He was filled with courage to enter any trial, armed with the transforming knowledge that the one who commands the wind and sea would never abandon him but would see him safely to other side. Peter had many more trials, but no trial ever kept him from seeing the greatness of Christ's love and faithfulness to him.

You see, the gospel frees us to sacrifice and give in ways we never considered or thought possible. It's only the gospel that offers us the peace and security to embrace a costly obedience. That's what changed Peter's life. And it still changes lives today by bringing men and women out of their old ways and into the maturity of Christ.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

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