

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark the fourth chapter (4:35-41)

Glory to you O God

³⁵With the coming of evening that same day, Jesus said to the disciples, “Let’s cross over to the other shore.” ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took Jesus in the boat in which he was sitting. There were other boats with them. ³⁷Then a fierce gale arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat so much that it was almost swamped. ³⁸But Jesus was in the stern through it all, sound asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said, “Teacher, doesn’t it matter to you that we’re going to drown?” ³⁹Jesus awoke, rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be calm!” And the wind dropped and everything was perfectly calm. ⁴⁰Jesus then said to the disciples, “Why were you so frightened? Have you no faith?” ⁴¹But they became filled with fear and said to one another, “Who is this, whom even the wind and sea obey?”

Gospel of Christ

Praise to you O Christ

Grace and peace to you from God, who is with us in the midst of life’s storms – Amen.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus invites his disciples out onto the water. A simple ask, which would turn into a life-changing encounter in the face of the storm. Surprisingly, or perhaps unsurprisingly, Jesus is sleeping. We often find Jesus tired and in need of rest during the course of his ministry, but it would have been unusual for anyone to continue sleeping in the midst of gale force winds and friends’ frantic calls. When the disciples finally wake him, Jesus calms the storm and then asks, how could they think they stood alone in the face of such danger?

During the course of the pandemic, many have referred to our collective experiences as a storm. We can think, for instance, of the different “waves” we’ve been riding together – not only as individuals, but as a church and community often facing loss and grief.

Maybe you, like the disciples, have also felt alone in the midst of life’s storms. We might wonder, “Jesus, where are you? Where is God now, as I receive this troubling diagnosis? Where is God as my relationship crumbles? Or as my children struggle with their mental health?” We might even be so bold as to ask, “Are you sleeping up there?!”

It can be difficult in these times to see Jesus in the boat beside us. Especially because it’s true that, although we weather similar storms – including the pandemic – we are not necessarily in the same boat. For example, all of us have different stories to tell of our time in isolation and uncertainty as we move more towards reopening.

When faced with life's gale force winds, some of us may have needed to turn inward for a little while in order to make it through to the other side. Much like Jesus sleeping in the midst of the storm – sometimes we all need to focus in on our self-care! After all rest is a holy act.

Others may have maintained the capacity to help others, to send lifeboats or resources out to those most in need. It was just last week that our Holy Spirit food bank depot was just recognized for their ongoing service during the pandemic with the Janet Hughes Award. It's remarkable, truly, that so many of our community members maintained this work over the past year. And I know this is still only a small glimpse into the various ways our members and friends have used their gifts in the midst of the COVID-19 storm.

But of course, covid-19 isn't the only storm we have come to face.

My family, probably like yours, has been grieving and holding space for the recent findings at residential schools – for the bodies of children discovered on their grounds, and the renewed colonial trauma experienced by survivors. We remember those families who never got to welcome their children home.

We are also grieving the loss of the Afzaal and Salman families to islamophobia and hate with their tragic murder in London Ontario. But we also know this horrific event hits closer to home as a number of Muslim Women of Colour have been attacked within our own neighborhood – just down the street from our church.

Colonization and racism are ongoing storms – storms that we have not always tried to calm or help our neighbors through. And as God's people we are being called much like Jesus disciples to sit with Christ in the midst of these storms. To hold space for grief, pain, and uncertainty, as well as for the voices and needs of those most affected by their harms. And while we can never take the place of Jesus in this journey, we can come alongside each other, using our privilege, our gifts, and abilities to help where possible to help our community find a safe harbor from these ongoing storms.

Our individual capacities and the circumstances of our communities – both large and small – determine how we respond to life's challenges; those situations that feel life-threatening, scary, or out-of-control. But we are also given the gift of faith, to know that no matter how dire the circumstance, we are never alone.

After all, Jesus doesn't rebuke the disciplines for waking him. He says instead, "Of course I would never leave you alone." This is the promise of *God with us* – a promise that comes to us not only in our baptism but also in the form of the covenantal rainbow: Not that God would necessarily save us from life's storms, but that in life, death, and beyond

God has promised we will never again be alone. God always has us, and offers us the peace of this promise – in a world filled with challenges and needs.

As I prepare to go on parental leave, I can't know what storms this community will come to face. But I trust and know that God will accompany us all as we are called together to be Holy Spirit again in new and old ways.

Over the next few months as we prepare to re-open our doors, we will rediscover what it means to be God's people here at Holy Spirit. After all, storms can shake things loose or bring things to the surface. Sometimes this is what we need.

And so, I pray that you would hold space for one another in the midst of life's storms. I pray that in the coming journey, that you would not only trust in God's promises but also in each other. That you would uplift, uphold, and support one another and this community through the gifts God has entrusted to you in faith.

Finally, I pray that as my wife Danika and I welcome new life into this world, you too would be open to new ways of embodying community together – to extend the sense of welcome you've shown my family to those still seeking safe shore.

There are many changes and challenges underway, and I know God will be with you, beside you, and this community of faith as we emerge from this storm – guided by the promise and presence of God.

And may this continue to be so among us – Amen.