

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Matt Moberg
Peace in Chaos
Mark 4:35-41**

Good morning, everyone. How are we doing? My name is Matt Moberg and it's a pleasure to be with you. I usually preach on Sunday nights at The Table where I lead. If you ever want to swing through, we would love to have you there, but I'm here today and I'm excited to be here. This morning we are talking about life and peace and finding peace amidst the storms when things get chaotic, when things get scary and we're just kind of left wondering, "God, do You even care? Do You care what I'm going through? Do You care that it's negative 125 degrees outside and I can't feel my face any more? God, do You care?" It's one of those questions that lingers in the darkest of moments and we're going to step into that moment and ask God that question this morning.

Our text for today is found in Mark 4:35-41. Would you turn there now? You will find Bibles in the pews in front of you. The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark. It's the perspective of the apostle Peter. John Mark wrote it either while Peter was preaching or from reading his conversations. We do not know. We weren't there, but if you asked Peter what he could tell us about Jesus, his answer would be the Gospel of Mark. So, Mark 4:35-41 reads like this:

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."**36** Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.**37** A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.**38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"**39** He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.**40** He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"**41** They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Will you close your eyes and pray with me?

Father God, we give You this time this morning. We ask that You would speak the words that You want to speak, God, when You give us ears to hear how Your Spirit is moving in our presence. Jesus, we love You. We are here this morning for You. In Your Name, all God's children said,

[All:] Amen.

We are talking again about fear this morning. As we saw in that story, the disciples were in a scared place. Let me just clear up a common misconception. After 28 or 29 years of life now, I

am 29, I've finally been able to grow a beard. It's a healthy beard. I'm pretty proud about what's on my face right now. One of the misconceptions is "Matt, with so much masculinity, you're probably not afraid of anything." Such is not true. I have fears. I get gripped by fear and, yes, even those of us as this can get afraid from time to time. One of the fears that recurs for me, that happens the most often, is that when I fall asleep, I have terrifying nightmares. I'm a very visual person. Because it's hard to tell stories about dreams, it's usually too abstract, let's try to enter into my dream world. Can I get some dream music real quick, Kenny? [Music.] We can go to this place now.

I have had this dream ever since I became a father two years ago, and this is crazy but I have met other fathers who have experienced this same exact dream. I will be asleep next to my queen, fast asleep, smiling, not a care in the world. I just want to get some rest. I mean, John Crosby has been working me like a dog here. I just want to escape and get some good sleep. I will wake up in my dream, not actually waking up but in my dream, and see my little boy Wyatt. He'll be climbing on the window sill across the room and I'll look at him. He's got these big eyes and he says, "Look at me, Dad." He's climbing right on the ledge and he's going to do something. Or I'll see Wyatt lying between Lauren and me and I'll do the fatherly thing and kind of just brush his hair out of his eyes and all of a sudden, he'll start sinking in the blankets. I can't get to him in time. I'm ripping off the blankets, but he's nowhere to be found. Now, this one is the most absurd but, honestly, it's probably the most common of all my dreams. I will see Wyatt just planking on top of our bedroom door. It's absurd. It shouldn't register as real, but I am terrified and it feels very real.

What happens next is I will jump out of bed in a hot mess. I'll pull off all the blankets and start digging between Lauren and me. Or I'll rush to the window sill or I'll rush to the door. I'm screaming. I'm sweating. I'm just real bothered in this moment because I can't find him. He's nowhere to be found. Then, as if things were not bad enough, I turn to my wife, my beautiful wife whom I love very much, and she is fast asleep with a smile on her face. Couldn't be more at peace and I'm so angry. I am so angry. "Lauren, don't you care? Our son is lying on top of our bedroom door and you don't seem to care. You don't seem bothered at all. In fact, I've never seen you so happy." She's comfortably asleep, but eventually she will wake up and come over and kind of talk me out of it. This literally happened last week. This is a recurring dream. She will say, "Honey, it's okay. Come back to reality. It's okay. It's a dream." Then, even though I'm fully aware that I'm awake, I kind of fake that I'm out of it. "Lauren, what's going on? I have no idea what I'm saying."

I bring that up because this story is very much like the story in our text. The disciples are in the midst of this hot mess. They're terrified. Death is close. The waves are crashing on board. The boat is about to sink and Jesus is fast asleep. The disciples go, "Teacher, don't You care? Doesn't it bother You on any level that we are about to die? How could You sleep in a moment like this?" How offensive is that? There is not a lonelier question, a more isolating, anxious question than when your world is crashing down and you just want to know, does anybody else care? I am feeling the same, all those worries. I'm scared out of my mind and I don't know if anybody else cares. "Hey, God, do You care? God, if You are real, it feels like You are asleep." Not God's place to be. Let's go back to the text because I think it has a lot to say to us about what peace inside the storm looks like. Mark, chapter 4:

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."**36** Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat.

“Let’s go to the other side.” Again, I’m only 29, but one thing I have learned is that so much of life is about getting from point A to point B, getting to the other side. Maybe there is a hardship in your life that you are experiencing right now and you can’t wait to get to the other side. “I cannot wait to get to the other side of this disease. It is wreaking havoc on my body.” “I cannot wait to get to the other side of the turmoil that is inside my marriage or inside my friendship.” “I cannot wait to get to the other side of hearing about the abundant life of Jesus Christ and of actually getting to experience it.” “I can’t wait to get to the other side.”

In this moment Jesus is inviting His disciples to come with Him so they can get to the other side. You will notice here that there is a crowd present. It says, “Leaving the crowd behind…” This doesn’t seem like the opportune time to leave. It sounds like they have a good thing going here on *this* side. Why go to the other side? What business do they possibly have on the other side? What is Jesus thinking to leave a group of people who are leaning in, interested in what He is teaching, curious about what He has to say and saying, “Let’s go over to the other side”? Very easy to forfeit our callings when a crowd comes along. It’s very easy to forget that Jesus has called us to much more than a crowd. He’s put us on a mission when He says to go to the other side. That invitation to trust Him and step inside the boat doesn’t always make sense. Despite our circumstances and our emotions in these moments, we need to trust that Jesus actually does know best. And so, when Jesus says, “Let us get into the boat, let’s go over there, let’s walk that way,” the disciples get in the boat. What happens then? The text goes on,

There were also other boats with him.**37** A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.**38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Do you see the weight of that angst? “Teacher, don’t You care? Death is close.” The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below the sea level and because of the surroundings, the wind would come in there and hit the center of the lake. Storms just kick up out of nowhere. It could be calm one moment when they are getting into the boat and then all of a sudden, things get crazy. That’s what is happening here and it still happens today on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples feel that death is close. They trusted Jesus when He said, “We’re going to the other side.” “Jesus, we thought that You meant that and so we followed You into the boat.” They got into the boat and now death is close and they are terrified and they are wondering, “Jesus, do You care?”

When I listened to Debbie Manning read the Prayers [of the People] earlier, the prayers that are springing up in this room, I have to imagine that there are some of us who are wondering that this morning, who are feeling the weight of life, who are feeling darkness and hardships. “Jesus, do You care? Are You going to wake up soon?” This question has been on my mind actually these past few weeks, “God do You care?”

A couple of weeks ago a group of us from The Table went to Israel and Palestine for the purpose of trying to learn what it looks like to be peacemakers in a violent world. What it looks like to be those who are trying to calm the storms globally, but also here in our neighborhood. What does that look like? When we were over there, we were meeting with people on all sides of the conflict, hearing stories from Palestinians and stories from Israelis and coming face to face with a lot of the wounds that have been cut open in this place of turmoil.

One of the places we went to was the Balata Refugee Camp on the West Bank. There was this man we met who is a peacemaker. He's been making peace there and striving to build a community of peace for the past 25 years and he's tired. He's fatigued. Balata is made up of 30,000 people all living within a quarter of a square kilometer, stacked on top of each other, one doctor for 30,000 people. People are angry. People are hurt. People are out of resources. He's come to a place where he's asking, "God, do You care?" He's seeing and hearing about suicide bombers who are coming out of this neighborhood to act aggressively, outbursts, and he's wondering, "God, do You care? God, I'm working for peace. I'm trying to do Kingdom work. God, do You care?" He talked about his own 7-year-old child as he was walking us through the streets of Balata, how his own 7-year-old child came to him the other day, expressing a desire to bring violence into the world and strike back against the enemy. He said, "Do you know what it's like to stand before your own 7-year-old son and feel completely incompetent?" "God, do You care?"

A few days after that, the same group went up the mount of the Beatitudes. After a holy time where we read Scripture together and prayed together, we read the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus stood there and preached. We spread the ashes of one of our friends from our community, who at 28 years of age passed away from colon cancer. You can't spread the ashes of a 28-year-old without asking the question simultaneously, "God, do You care? God, are You going to wake up?"

Or, when you're over there and for two weeks straight sitting in these different painful places and seeing these wounds cut open and expressed, we are feeling the angst of the land and hearing the angst inside of us. It is easy to believe that the storm wins and that Our Savior is asleep, but I just don't think that is true because while we might live in that feeling and those emotions and feel like they are waves crashing on top of us, the Scriptures are written in much the same tone. Much of the Psalms say, "Even though the wicked are winning, God, we believe that You are good. God, we believe that You are faithful. God, we believe that You are here, but it doesn't always feel like it makes sense."

On the plane ride home, I sat next to this man who was talking to me about Elie Wiesel's book *Night* about his holocaust experience. And so, because I had 14 hours to spare, I sat there and read it from front to back. One of the quotes that jumped out at me was his account of one of the concentration camps, seeing a little boy being killed. It reads like this.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"For God's sake, where is God?"

And from within me, I heard a voice answer:

"Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows"

You see, this is the story of Jesus Christ. It is the Word becoming flesh. It is the Word that became flesh, not to bring us solutions and massive overhaul to all the darkness that we see. ISIS over there is not how the Kingdom works. It is not bringing quick-fix, reactive solutions. It is about bringing solidarity. The Word became flesh and God is with us in the midst of our pain. He stepped into the gallows. He steps into the hurting. Matthew 25:40, "I'm with the least of these." Faith in Christ means believing that Christ is with us and trusting that even in the storms, our Savior is present. Even when things get hard, God will wake up and make things right because Christian faith believes in the long game. We believe that the reality of God and the goodness of

God is not dictated by whether or not there is a storm coming. We believe that the Kingdom is unfolding at all times. When we see it, do we trust that God is good?

One of the most important lines in our text, I think, is that line in verse 36 where it says, "There were also other boats with Him." Why is that so important? Because it reminds us that whether Jesus is in your boat or not, "Friends, I've got a problem." They are in another boat. While I might wish that God would Bubble Wrap His people, that we would not face any problems whatsoever and never get hurt, that life would be made of a blissful peace, it's just not the reality. Whether Jesus is in your boat or not, storms are going to come.

But here's the other side to that. We need to remember that the only reason we are in this boat wasn't our doing. It was Jesus' idea that we get in the boat. It was Jesus who said, "Let's go to the other side," and what Jesus starts, Jesus is going to finish. That is a Biblical promise, whether in this life or the next, we are going to be formed into people worthy of the King. Philippians 1:6 tells us just that. It says,

. . . **6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ

The question is, do we allow that completion to happen? Will we stay with Jesus, trusting that Christ is in our corner and allow Him to finish that which He began when He invited us into the boat in the first place? The text goes on in Mark, talking about Jesus waking up.

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. **40** But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

That's an interesting thing to say. When I read that text, there is a part of me that gets a little bothered by Jesus, if I can say so in church. It almost feels condescending, like, "I ought to apologize, Jesus, that not all of us have the ability to dictate the weather. We don't all have that kind of power. Allow me to cringe a little bit while the storm is raging and threatening to take my life. This is a scary moment. Please be afraid. Kind of be human and experience this." But because we know Jesus, we know that He is not the condescending type. What is He really saying here? He is not asking you to belittle the storm, to belittle the pain that you are going through. He is not asking you to giggle anyway and pretend like all is well. He is saying, "Where is your faith in Me? Where is your trust?" You see, when we get afraid, fear can paralyze faith real quickly. Instead of the disciples coming to Jesus and saying, "Teacher, will You please come and help us right now?" they are not just asking for His help. They are assuming the very worst and it becomes a fear-induced accusation. They say, "Teacher, don't You care?" In other words, "Teacher, Jesus, You are not who You said You were. You said that we could trust You, yet You're asleep right now." Everything is hitting the fan. "Jesus, don't You care?"

Jesus asked them, "Why are you so afraid? You still have no faith that I am *for* you, that I am in your corner, that I love you. When I said I want to get us to the other side, I meant it. Did you lose your trust in Me?" Matthew and Luke talk about this story as well and it is interesting that in this part right here, they all recall the details slightly differently. Peter, in the Gospel of Mark, remembers it as,

40 Do you still have no faith?" [Mark 4:40]

But Matthew remembers it as, “you still only have a little faith.”

²⁶ . . . “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” [Matthew 8:26]

And as for Luke, it says they completely lost their faith.

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” [Luke 8:24]

How are you approaching Jesus today in the midst of storms and the sunny days in your life? Which one of these Gospels sounds most like your voice? No faith, a little faith, a faith gone missing? The grace of God, the beautiful story in this story, is that no matter how we are approaching Jesus, before Jesus turns to His disciples, He stands up and calms the storm. Whether we are worthy of it or not and, friends, let me tell you, we are not, God still chooses to love. He still chooses to lean in and calm the storms in our lives because what He begins in us, He will bring to a finish. Your calling will be completed. Formation will happen because God is with you.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us [John 1:14].

And it does so today, but we are not alone. I know that doesn’t make it easy. I know that in all of our different levels of pain and experiences of grief that we are going through or have gone through or will go through, it is not always easy knowing that God is not going to calm every storm on the spot, but we believe and trust that Jesus is in our corner and is with us in our pain and in our good times.

To close, I want to read some words of Isaiah because they are a gift to us. They are a promise from God to us. What He starts in us, He will carry it to completion because He walks with us. It reads like this.

¹But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
²When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
³For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your stead.
⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.

Friends, do not be afraid for God is with you. Amen?

[All:] Amen.

Let me pray.

Lord, we know that life is hard. We know that life can feel dark and scary at times. God, we are reminded of You in the garden the night before the cross when everybody else fell asleep and You were left wondering, “Does anybody else care?” But You are omniscient, God. You went silent before Your accusers. You went to the cross and three days later, You conquered and defeated death. Lord, remind us that the Kingdom is not about risks. It is about You. Give us the courage to step into the boat and believe that through that, You are in our corner. Help us believe that what You start, You will finish. You will get us to the other side. Jesus, You are good. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.