

Peace, Be Still

Mark 4: 35-41

Peace, Be Still

It's all in the voice tone, in the posture, in the pronunciation. You know the old saying, "It's not what you said, it's how you said it."

Sometimes the Lord God whispers this statement into our ears, "Peace, Be still." When we are tending to a very sick loved one in the hospital, we hear that calming, soft voice in the back of our minds, "Peace, Be still. All is well, even though he or she is struggling, ultimately, all will be well. Peace, be still." God whispers.

Sometimes the Lord God shouts into our lives. We can see Jesus, marching determinedly to the prow of the boat. You can see his frustration over these anxious and fearful disciples. He steps up and speaks up, "Peace. Be Still." When we go way off course or we are making things worse or we are so eaten up with fear that we are forgetting our faith...sometimes God shouts into our lives telling us to stop, to take our feet off the gas and step back and live in trust and faith. Sometimes God intervenes because what we are doing is contrary to a life of faith. God Shouts.

Which is it today? Which do we need to hear – a whisper or a shout – or even both.

Let's enter this story with our spiritual kin from the first century, with those first disciples of Jesus. They have been busy, helping Jesus with teaching and preaching and instructing the spiritually hungry people on this new way to live. Jesus describes the kingdom with all these parables, these stories about farmers scattering seeds and so on. But then, when evening comes, Jesus invites the disciples to get into the boats and sail over to the other side. The squalls and storms can rise up quickly on the Sea of Galilee, which was actually Lake Galilee, a freshwater lake surrounded by huge mountains rising 2000 feet above the lake's surface. It was a deep lake, much like Keowee or Jocasee due to the mountainous terrain, so the wind was funneled through the mountain valleys and could kick up large waves on this lake.

And of course, the disciples look at the waves and wind, assessing the danger, and they forget who's sleeping in the stern on cushions. They are in a boat with the Son of God no less, the Lord over all creation, and they grow afraid.

"Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?"

Years later, I wonder if these disciples looked back on this event and laughed, poking fun at themselves. "Can you believe it?" they may have said to one another. "We were acting like God sent the Son into the world not to save the world but to die in a windstorm on the Sea of Galilee. We were so foolish." Nevertheless, there they were...ordinary, human, afraid.

And isn't that just like us human beings? When the storms of life arise, we take our eyes off Jesus, we forget with whom we are travelling, and we panic. "Teacher (God) do you not care that we are perishing?"

Living a life of fear vs. living a life of faith.

But before we assume this is some form of denial wherein we pretend everything in the world is just fine...notice that when Jesus turned to the disciples he did not say, "There's nothing to be afraid of." No, he did not deny the reality of the waves and the wind. Instead he said, "Why are you afraid. Have you still no faith?"

This week I was thinking on these things and posted a statement on my Facebook page, not thinking too much

about what the response may be. Here's what I wrote and posted:

"Be afraid, be very, very afraid."

-Mantra of fear-based cultural warriors.

"Do not be afraid, do not fear."

-Refrain found in the Bible on almost every other page. No comparison.

Evidently plenty of people are highly sensitized to the pervasive fear in our culture now, given the variety of responses to this post – allow me to share a sampling with you:

-Lance, a Lutheran pastor says: Yup. I've long preached that it is not doubt that is the opposite of faith, but fear.

-Rita, a disciple in the Baptist tradition posts: So much fear. My heart is so heavy this morning. How do good people not see what is happening?

-Mark, an Executive Presbyter says: So counter-cultural!

-Doug, an Episcopal Priest looking for sermon help says: Mark's account of the stilling of the storm is up this Sunday in the Revised Common Lectionary. Thank you Holy Spirit!

-Johathan, the pastor at Traveler's Rest UMC says: Our Call to Worship for June has been this (part of our '(DO NOT BE) Afraid' sermon series):

They say: 'The world's a scary place.'

God says: 'Do not be afraid, I am with you.'

They say: 'Those are some scary people.'

Jesus says: 'Do not be afraid, follow Me.'

They say: 'This is a scary life.'

The Spirit says: 'Do not be afraid, I am your Comforter, your Advocate, Your Guide.'

We say: 'The Lord is my light and salvation, Whom shall I fear?'

-Rob, a Baptist pastor says, Keith Getty likes to point out that "sing" is the second most common command in the Bible. "Don't be afraid" is #1.

-And so on.

'The Lord is my light and salvation, Whom shall I fear?'

Church of Jesus Christ, God has given us everything we need to be the people in the world who are not afraid.

Though the mountains quake, though the waves and wind rage around us, we will not be afraid.

Our culture, our society, needs the witness right now of disciples of Jesus who demonstrate what it looks like to be people who are confident and proactive and moving ahead. We accept God's word for us today, which is Peace, Be Still.

Sometimes God speaks this command to us individually, commanding us to lay aside the fear and live in faith and trust. Other times, God speaks to our world through God's church with a mighty shout.

That too happened this week. We started seeing images of families separated at our southern border. At first many of us didn't believe them; thinking this was fake news. "Surely this can't be true, this kind of thing doesn't happen in the USA." But, unfortunately it became painfully clear that this was the case. I found myself thinking, "O Lord, why does this have to happen when I'm the Sabbatical Pastor? I wanted the world just to settle down and behave well while pastor Laura is gone so that nothing even remotely controversial would rise up. I would prefer things to remain calm O Lord, if you could arrange that please?"

And then other more important questions began to rise: Is this really true? If so, does it rise to the level of being a moral issue like it seems? Would people think I'm being political rather than simply being Christian if I mentioned it? I don't really want to know how anyone votes or what they think about politics, so if I mention this will they think I have a political agenda? The last thing I want is to get mixed up in that. But this really seems like a moral

issue. Perhaps I could ask the other pastors and staff for their input in the staff meeting tomorrow. What do you say Lord God?

So, while I'm thinking these thoughts and praying for guidance, the strangest thing happened. In my other job with Pinnacle Leadership Associates, we work with churches and denominations of all kinds in the Christian community, so I'm on email lists and connected with them in social media in various ways. I began seeing the statements condemning family separation coming from Christian denominations in this country. Allow me to share the list of these denominations and see if you can identify with me what is strange about it:

Episcopal Communion in America, Lutheran Synod ELCA, Presbyterian Church USA, United Methodist Conference, The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, The Moravian Church, The Disciples of Christ, The Catholic Bishops. The American Baptist Convention.

So, OK, I might have expected these. But the list goes on: The Southern Baptist Convention, The Church of the Nazarene (If you don't know the Church of the Nazarene, they are somewhere to the right of the Southern Baptists), and then Franklin Graham himself, the one who's been so aligned with one political perspective "told the Christian Broadcasting Network on Tuesday, "It's

disgraceful, and it's terrible to see families ripped apart and I don't support that one bit."

And the list goes on. Eventually I needed to move on so I stopped adding to this list.

What is strange about this is the unanimity in the Christian Church. We have not seen the Christian community unified in voice around anything in such a long, long time. Liberal, Moderate, Conservative, and Fundamentalists alike are joining together and lifting their collective voices. It's like God was saying to the practice of family separation through all the branches of God's Church, "Peace, Be Still."

Sometimes, God's word to our world is clear and unmistakable, "Peace, Be Still!"

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, what will it be for us this day? Are we going to live in fear, focusing on the wind and the waves, cowering in the boat? Or are we going to be people of faith, knowing that since Christ is for us, who can be against us? We can live reflecting the strong confidence of Jesus our Lord, or we can live with hysteria and fear like disciples in a boat fixated on the storm rather than on who's in the boat with them.

Those words of Jesus were not only for the storm, not only for those first disciples, but for us this day.

Sometimes it's a shout, meaning "stop and desist," spoken like an effective teacher in charge of the classroom. Peace and Be Still!!!!

Sometimes it's a whisper, relieving our anxiety and worry. Peace, be still.

Sometimes it's a call to action, inviting us to work for peace in a world infatuated with selfish power.

But every time it's heard and experienced, we are changed.

Peace, Be Still.

May it be so in our lives even now.

Through the grace, power and love of Jesus Christ our Lord may it become so. Amen.