

McCabe United Methodist Church

May 30, 2010

Luke 8:22-25

Don't Leave Home Without It

by: Pastor Gary Walters

Our scripture lesson this morning comes from Luke, Chapter 8, verses 22-25; this is "Jesus Calms The Storm." "One day Jesus said to his disciples 'Let's go over to the other side of the lake.' So they got into a boat and set out and as they sailed Jesus fell asleep. A squall came up on the lake so that the boat was being swamped and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke Jesus saying 'Master, master, we're going to drown.' Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters. The storm subsided and all was calm. 'Where is your faith?' Jesus asked his disciples.' In fear and amazement, they asked one another, 'Who is this, he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him.'" The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God!

There is a phrase branded on our minds, "Don't leave home without it." I'm a little dubious about that line from the commercial, after all I'm 40, I've never owned an American Express card and I've left home many, many times without it and done just fine. But, it certainly does apply at times and certainly the disciples discovered that in today's story.

A little bit of geography is helpful in terms of this story. I'm sure you've heard this before, but the sea of Galilee is kind of a unique formation. Even though it is a very large body of water, it actually sits 300 feet below sea level. Then the water flows out from there down the Jordan River to the Dead Sea, which sits, I think, 600 feet below sea level (although I'm forgetting some of the facts on my biblical geography a little bit). Sitting below sea level like that it breeds some very strange weather. Being below sea level like that it is very warm and very humid, not very far from the ocean and then there are major mountains just to the north. Weather blows in from either of those and when it drops down into that valley it can produce storms in an instant.

On the other hand, at least a handful of the disciples were fishermen by trade and had grown up on this lake and no doubt had faced such storms on other occasions. These men had been there and done that more than once. So, it is saying something that they were afraid for their lives because of this storm. It must have been intense indeed. Somehow in the midst of all of this Jesus is sleeping. I'm not sure that he was really asleep, the scripture doesn't say, maybe he was just laying there to test and see what the disciples would do, maybe he had such confidence in their abilities, their sea craft that he did worry about it, or maybe the demands of the crowd had been just that exhausting and tiring so that he slept calmly even in the midst of that storm. But, nonetheless, the disciples were kind of left alone on the sea to defend for themselves as this storm raged around them. At some point they figured it out and they go and wake Jesus up.

Now, the context of this passage is very telling. There is actually a whole series of miracles here and Luke is preparing us for what is going to happen in Chapter 9. In Chapter 9, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" and Peter responds "You are the Christ." That is kind of the turning point in all of the gospels because at that point Jesus really withdraws from the crowds and starts focusing more on his disciples. His Galilee ministry has basically ended and his face is set toward Jerusalem and the rest of the gospels are really his journey from there to the cross. So Jesus needs to know that the disciples get it. Luke is preparing us for that in the way that he has set this whole thing up. Jesus has been preaching and teaching to the crowds but now there is this series of miracles that really help define who Jesus is and what it means when Peter says "You are the Christ."

But, within all of these stories there is the obvious response of the disciples or the crowds or of an individual. Let me walk through those just a moment. In this story the disciples are filled with fear but then in response they're filled with questions. If their fear of the storm was great I would imagine the fear of the calm was even moreso and that it sent chills down their spine for they were sitting in a boat, in the presence of one who could command the waves and the wind and it obeyed. They were filled with questions. Well, in the next story Jesus heals a demon-possessed man at Gerasene which is on the other side of the Sea of Galilee and basically a gentile area and while the man healed of the demons responds in faith, the crowds there respond with fear and then rejection. They ask Christ to leave, they don't want anything to do with him. Remarkable considering that he had just healed one of their own and that they saw so clearly his power displayed and yet they reject him.

Then, there are really two miracles, one within the other. Jesus is on the way to Jairus' house to heal his daughter and on the way a woman sneaks up, in the press of the crowd, and she touches the hem of Jesus' robe, knowing that if she just touches the robe she will be healed, and she is. Jesus turns around and he sweeps the crowd and he says "Who touched me?" which is kind of an incredible question because the crowds are pressing in all around, hundreds of people have touched him and yet that woman sought him in faith. She is afraid at the question but she pipes up and says "It was me." Fear indeed, because she had a medical condition that made her unclean for decades and had suffered miserably from it, yet, she dared to touch this teacher, this rabbi. Yet Jesus looks on her and says "Daughter, your faith has made you well." She seeks him. Then, about that time servants from Jairus' household show up and say "Master, trouble the teacher no more, your daughter is dead." Jesus turns to Jairus and says "Fear not, only believe." And he responds with complete obedience and his daughter is healed.

One by one, Luke checks off just what it means that Jesus is the Christ. Here is one who has power over nature, here is the one who has power over spirits, here is the one who has power over health and life and death. Fear not. Wow! That's good news! That Christ is the one who can command the waves and bring calm to the storms, not just on the sea but in the storm of our lives; because this stuff is not light hearted. These are tough things, unimaginably so at times and yet Christ has the power over all of it. That's good news! That's the best news!

A kind of amazing illustration of that comes from one of the songs we sang this morning, “It Is Well.” Horatio Spafford, who wrote that song, was a Spanish immigrant to America. He went ahead of his family, his daughter and his wife, and got things set up. When he was ready he sent word back to Spain to have them come over. But their sea voyage did not go so well and that ship was lost and in hearing the news of the loss of the ship and the death of his wife and daughter, understandably he was overwhelmed with grief. But, somewhere in the midst of that grief he sat down and wrote the words to this hymn, it is well with my soul. Amazing! Not that his loss was taken away, not that his heart wasn’t broken, but that Christ was in control and it was well with his soul. That the one who watched over his soul was Lord of nature, Lord of life, Lord of death and that ultimately it was well with his soul, despite the circumstances, despite the storms, despite it all. That’s incredible. It’s a powerful word for us that no matter what the storm we may find ourselves in that ultimately it is God, it is Christ, who is in control and has the power, and it is he who cares for us, he who watches over us, and so it is well.

But, there is this question thrown into the middle of all of this. Jesus turns to his disciples and says “where is your faith?” He doesn’t accuse them of being faithless, he knows better, after all they’ve followed him for two years, they’ve dropped their trades and their lives and they have followed him and they have helped him in his ministry. They’re not faithless, but at least in this first test they left it at home. They did leave home without it. They forgot the object of their faith was with them and their trust, well they were overwhelmed by immediate circumstances and the waves and the wind and so they fear instead of have faith.

Well it’s a good question for us. Where is your faith? Remember, don’t leave home without it, because it is that faith that will give us that promise, and assurance that it is well, no matter the storm.

Would you pray with me? Lord, we thank you that you are in control. Give us faith to trust in you, give us faith to trust in the midst of circumstances that would beg to differ, that indeed you are in control, it is well, it is well with our souls. Amen.