

Sermon Mark 4 35 41: “Today Might be the Day.” This passage from the Gospel of Mark holds a profound message for us today, reminding us that each day is an opportunity for a new beginning in our spiritual journey.

As we delve into the Gospel of Mark, we witness Jesus and his disciples at the seaside, having just concluded his teachings to the masses. These teachings, such as the parable of the farmer and the Mustard Seed, hold the key to the kingdom of God, a key unveiled to those who seek it. However, to those on the outside, everything is veiled in parables. As the evening descended, Jesus and his disciples, in their journey of ministry, embarked on a boat to cross the sea to the eastern shore. Mark narrates it this way. “That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” The disciples, in their unwavering faith in Jesus, followed his lead, demonstrating the power of faith in the face of uncertainty.

Suppose you remember what a day it had been. Jesus had just been accused of being Satan, and then his mother and brothers visited to take him home. I’m sure Jesus was looking for a refreshing change of scenery, so the designation of time is of particular note. Where were they headed? They were to pass over, which detects a sign of urgency, to the other side, the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, where the Jews dared not go but where the Gentiles lived.

In those times, the Sea of Galilee was notorious for swallowing entire ships and engulfing people. Under explosive thunderstorms and gale-force winds, waves could soar to a height of 10-12 feet and sometimes up to 20 feet. And so, the sea was regarded as a place of death. However, Jesus, in stark contrast to the disciples' fear, was cool and collected. No worries, get in the boat. I’m tired.

I have never been fond of flying. I’d actually never flown in a plane until I entered the military. After Pat and I flew home from Italy to get married, I remember the day Pat and I needed to return to Italy. In order to get there, we had to take a hopper from Hagerstown to Philadelphia. Little did we know that we were about to feel what it’s like to find peace in a storm by getting into a small two-prop airplane. On **that day**, the weather was not good; as a matter of fact, it was terrible, and neither of us had ever flown on such a small plane, let alone on any aircraft in bad weather. Little did we know that the plane ride was about to get bumpy. The voice of our pilot pulled the curtain back and asked us, as passengers, to make sure our seatbelts were fastened. Soon, the plane took off, pitching like a ship on a wind-whipped ocean, and while the other small group of passengers were doing their best to deal with the turbulence, all I remember was holding on as tightly with white knuckles as I could, looking at Pat with wide eyes, praying to Jesus to get us down. When the plane landed, I thanked God for getting me down safely, but as I looked at the other passengers, they all seemed so calm, as if the flight had gone smoothly. As with Jesus’ disciples, who were seasoned fishermen, Jesus was with them and us. This is what I learned: storms don’t stop us from getting to where our Lord wants us to go. They can be the very place where we find peace if we trust in Him.

In this storm story, we encounter the first of four narratives that vividly illustrate Jesus’ dominion over nature. Before we delve into the understanding that God’s plan may be sudden and severe, often presenting unexpected challenges, we must acknowledge that His presence

accompanies His plan. As followers of Jesus, we will discover that God orchestrates circumstances in our lives to deepen our faith in the One we should already trust. Let us now turn to prayer.

Lord Jesus, in the midst of life's storms, we stand before You, seeking Your guidance and shelter. We entrust ourselves to Your mighty hands, recognizing You as the tranquility amidst the chaos. Lord, I stand here today, interceding for the hearts of those in the path of a storm. May they discover serenity in Your eternal love and cling to Your word as an anchor in times of turbulence. This is my prayer, Amen.

Jesus had to have been tired from his busy day, as Mark says He soon fell asleep. Mark writes, "Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion." Jesus wanted them to take the boat route. Stories like this do not read like legends. Now, we have to be thinking like the disciples. Why in the world would Jesus think about sleep when he knows when a storm is coming? Don't you care that we are about to die? In the silence of the Lord, we can hear him say: why are you so afraid? The rescue was more terrifying than the storm. Who is this that even the wind and waves obey? It has to be God! It is one of three consecutive stories about things that obey Jesus. Healing the sick and raising the dead, he commands demons, and they obey him, and this one is where Jesus commands the weather. Mark's point is that demons, disease, death, and the weather all obey Jesus. Why wouldn't you?

None of us are immune to life's storms. Not a single one. Yet, just as the disciples, who initially cowered in fear of the storm, later came to hold Christ in higher esteem, the storms we confront can lead us to a more profound understanding of God. Indeed, we may not comprehend why God permits trials to enter our lives. The intricacies of God's actions are too deep for us to fathom. However, we can be assured that His intention in testing our faith is to fortify it.

Recently, I had a conversation with a person grappling with a health issue who confessed that through the struggle, their faith had not grown stronger. They had admitted a lack of belief in the power of prayer—a spiritual shipwreck of the soul. We should not be surprised by surprises in our lives. Those surprises are divinely ordained moments whereby God is working in the everyday circumstances of life to reveal who He is, who we are, and who we need! Trials and tribulations, difficulties, and desperate moments are often the times when God does His most remarkable work in our lives, driven to Him and Him alone as Savior and rescuer.

I remember another time in my life when I was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. The moment in time was another one of the most awful experiences in my life. A good friend of mine was also stationed there, and we would get together on the weekend with a Staff Sergeant who had a boat. It was not a big boat by any stretch of the imagination. One weekend, we took off early in the morning for an island off the coast about ten miles out. We had a grand old time that day, fishing and swimming. Smooth sailing all the way. All we had with us was two cases of beer, no water, and little food. We camped overnight on the beach of the island, only to awaken the following day to some raging weather of high wind and three-foot waves. Now what? Back then, cell phones had not yet been developed. We packed up and started for land. We began taking on water, bailing the water out by hand. The wind kept pushing us around.

I fell overboard once and luckily climbed back aboard. Finally, the four of us made it back to land as the sergeant's wife was waiting for us, scared half out of her mind. Only by the grace of God did we make it back alive.

Don't miss the point that Jesus sent his disciples into the boat, knowing that a storm was coming. In order to get to the other side, they had to go through a storm. Do not think that just because you might be going through some choppy water, you are somehow being punished for disobedience. Believe me when I say that God does send some storms to get our attention. My guess is that you are in one of three places today: You are in a storm right now, you are coming out of a storm, or you are about to head into one.

When that storm comes, they often arrive suddenly, like in a split second, out of nowhere. All it takes is one phone call, a doctor's visit, an accident, or a job loss. Sometimes, storms of life are severe, and sometimes they are surprising. What I am telling you, what Jesus is telling you, and what Peter is telling you, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

Before I close, I want to share another choppy time where I found peace in the midst of the storm. If you have not heard this before, I am a cancer survivor. The day I received the phone call with the results of my biopsy, I did not feel like the disciples that Jesus was asleep. Why? Because I knew that Jesus would be my shelter in the storm. A month following the news, I had surgery to remove the cancer. I have been cancer-free for more than twelve years. That's why I keep plugging away at serving Jesus and spreading the good news of the gospel. Storms often expose how we are not trusting in the Lord, and storms often expose that God does care, for as Spurgeon once said, "God is too wise to err, too good to be unkind; leave off doubting Him, and begin to trust Him, for in so doing, you will put a crown on His head."

My dear friends, as I close, do not confuse God's silence with a lack of compassion because He cares deeply for you and me. It is only in the storms of life that we come to understand who Jesus really is. We learn more about Christ when we are in crisis. Storms are not sent to destroy you but to develop you. Since Jesus is who He says, then we have nothing to fear. His plans for us might puzzle us, and yes, His plans often include problems, but they come with His presence and a demonstration of His power. We have all asked Him...Aren't you concerned? Don't you know? If you were only here earlier? Don't you care? Isn't it so much easier to trust God when the sun is shining than to trust Him when the storm is raging around? Don't be hasty. Even when you think things are falling apart. Don't fear. **Today might be the day** when the time has come when you need to hear his voice say, "Peace, be still!" The storm will run out of breath, and the sea will become like glass.

Father God, we thank you, Master of the Wind and Waves, that you control the storms of life. Nothing can touch us without Your permission. This is no time for fear. Increase our faith so that we trust you when the waves threaten to overwhelm us. In this, I pray, Amen.