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Life on the Water: Does God Care?

Mark 4:35-41

This is week 2 in our series, Life on the Water. How many of you loved this week that we live near water? Who saw fireworks over water? Jumped in water? Looked up waterfront properties on the water so that you could be there next year? We're looking this summer at the time Jesus spent in waterfront towns just like ours. The fishermen who hung around Jesus came to know really critical things about who God is on the water, and I pray that we do, too.

I'm calling this message, "Does God Care?" a question that comes right out of our text and also a question I know we're asking on a regular basis. Does God care about my family? Does God care about the political turmoil of the day? Does God care about guns in schools? Does God care that my friend is sick? Does God care? In our story our experienced fishermen are caught up in a wicked storm and in their fear, they ask Jesus, do you care?

Kids, I want to ask you to help us get into this story. Can you come down for me and join me here on the stage?

Were any of you afraid of the sound of the fireworks this week? Can you show me how you responded when you'd hear, "Boom!" Well, I was afraid! Huge ones were being setting off just a couple doors down, and when I heard one when I was outside with Reed, I ran right for him! He was calm, but I was afraid!

What kind of things make you afraid? Can you show me what it looks like when are afraid?

Now, can you show me what it looks like when you're not afraid anymore? When suddenly the light turns on or the fireworks stop or...?

In our story today, there is a GREAT storm. Can you say, GREAT storm, with me? A GREAT storm. What do you think a GREAT storm sounds like? Can you make any of the noises? When this GREAT storm happens, Jesus' friends wake up Jesus who is SLEEPING through the GREAT storm, and they say to him, "Teacher, do you care that we are going to drown?"

Does Jesus hug them and say, this is a bad one! Come hide with me, I'll keep you safe? What do you think? No! Jesus stands up and he *speaks to that great storm*, "Silence! Be still!" And you know what? The storm got silent! And went still. And our story says a GREAT calm came. Can you say GREAT calm? Can you show me what that might look like? There was a great storm. Jesus made a great calm. And then Jesus asks, "Why were you so afraid? Do you *still* not have faith?"

Can you imagine you're at school, it's pouring rain, and right before recess your teacher stood up and said to rain, Silence! Be still! And then it actually went still? What would you do?

The disciples were actually *more afraid* when they saw Jesus has the power over nature! They said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him." They recognized Jesus is GOD. And to be standing right next to God filled them with GREAT fear and amazement (Matthew says). Can you say GREAT fear? They didn't know what to do with it.

I hope today that each of you will know that you can talk to Jesus who is God. I hope you believe him and believe that he has the power to bring GREAT calm to your GREAT fears. God does care about each one of you. Let me pray.

Our passage gives us a really natural outline for the story today, following the repeated word, “Great” in this story. Let’s read the passage and watch for those greats.

Mark 4:35-41, p839 if you want to help your kids open up to the story. Mark 4:35-41: “On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! [or Silence!] Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

You’ve heard them a couple times now. What are the greats?

Great Storm — Great Calm — Great Fear

Our story sets up with a great storm. We have a description of crazy wind —the storm is described as a hurricane. This story really happened on the Sea of Galilee, a place known for its wicked storms. I imagine Lake Wenatchee near Leavenworth. Larry and I were there 1 day and it was amazingly calm. But the hills create this crazy tunnel where wind gets insane in a hurry, and the rest of the week we couldn’t be there because of the wind. These friends of Jesus in the boat are experienced fishermen. They know this particular sea. They know how to maneuver a boat. But this night’s storm was unique. And the men realize they need help, and so they wake up Jesus who, surprising to us, is sleeping through the storm — I love how Mark gives us this eye-witness detail— Jesus is asleep on the boat cushion. Like a toddler sleeping through fireworks.

Then the story starts by waking up Jesus. There would be no story if the men hadn’t woken up Jesus! No one would have recorded for all time a story of either a wrecked boat or simply reaching the other side. Instead, we have a story of grown men, experienced fishermen, recognizing they are completely helpless and waking up a carpenter who is a theology teacher, to get them through a storm. Mark tells us Peter’s story. Peter’s the outspoken one who is not ashamed to tell of how often he went in “bold.” And here Peter remembers waking up Jesus and saying, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

How relevant is this question? Have you noticed the tone of our culture’s response to gun violence and natural disasters? Twitter is full of calls for “Less #praying, more #doing.” It’s as if prayer doesn’t matter— *if*, and it’s a big *if* for our world, *if* there is a God, he’s asleep on a boat cushion riding this thing out. It’s as if the disciples are right there with our culture! “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?” They’re asking the same question, does God care? But with a very different tone. See, when they come to Jesus saying that, even by asking Jesus they’re acknowledging that Jesus should be able to do something about it. They can’t do anything. Jesus can.

The first step we take when we begin to walk with Jesus is to say I need help! Acknowledge that even with all your experience and ability, there are still some things you cannot do on your own, and Jesus can. Even if you’re frustrated that it seems like Jesus is asleep, you have to start by acknowledging that *he should be able to do something* about this! Only Jesus has the supreme power of God to save you. I think that insults some of our western frame of mind, our do it yourself, don’t need any help, don’t pray to a God who could.

I have a hard time asking for help. That surprises probably none of you. And I've passed this delightful trait onto my toddler. I see him have the same frustration fits publicly that I have all inside. One of his current catchphrases is, "I can't! I can't!" said while throwing himself on the ground and screaming. The stop sign falls off his toy Ms. Fritter, "I can't! I can't!" Life is over. Here's the thing: I don't blame him. Because he's 2 he just gets to express on the outside what I feel every time I get lost, trip, or bust the gardening hose. "I can't! I can't!"

We can't get any further in the story unless you see that this matters to you. First, does it matter to you if God cares? Second, can you admit that there are some things that you are just not capable of fixing yourself?

There's two things I want you to really grab hold of in this passage:

First — Jesus has the power to save you from perishing, once and for all. This story was not given first as a metaphor for the storms in our lives. It was a real storm that really happened. In this moment Jesus showed his power to save. When he commanded the wind and the waves, it was fully revealed to all those in the boats and to us that Creator God has shown up on earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus is God.

The disciples thought they were perishing. Are you willing to say the same? We're talking about life and death here and going to Jesus as the only one with the power to save you from death. Jesus has the power to save you for all eternity. I know we don't talk often as a culture about eternity. But there really is more to this life than here and now. Do you fundamentally believe that there is life after this that you cannot possibly attain for yourself? That there is a separation from God and we are perishing without him? Admit that you need Jesus. That's the first step to getting past the great storm. The great storm is that we *are* perishing without the saving work of Jesus. This is not easy. The first step: admit you're helpless and ask Jesus to save you.

Jesus went on to show not only his power over nature as Creator but also his power over death! Jesus died and rose again from the dead, so he is alive with all authority and power over Creation and even death today. He is worthy of our worship and our amazement whatever the circumstances of our lives. He is our eternal Savior forever and ever. He cares so much for you, cared so much that you were dying without him, that he saved you once and for all. Your eternity is secure. Your life in him is secure. His power as Savior remains unchallenged. And I pray you will see that that eternal salvation is beautiful and total and so full of love. Does God care that you are drowning? Yes. So he moved once and for all to save you. Who is this that the wind and the seas obey him? He is Jesus, the Son of God, your Savior, and worthy of our awe-filled worship. That is the once and for all story of his ability to save all who are perishing.

The second thing I want for you to grab hold of in this passage is that just as Jesus cares to save you for eternity, he also cares about the individual storms of your unique life. How would you fill in this blank, "God, do you not care that I am ___?" Just as Jesus disciples' did then, you can ask Jesus to meet you in the ongoing, great storms of your life. You can ask for the great calm. What I realized so deeply this week, though, is that more than calming my circumstances, Jesus *always* wants to silence my fears. Track with me here for a second...

In the great storm, the disciples say to Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing," right? Were they really perishing? Their boat was filling with water, but who or what told them they were *perishing*? The voice of fear. The voice made louder by the crashing waves and the howling wind. We have a spiritual enemy who wants us to be afraid, all the time. And so we are fed fear and doubt by our spiritual enemy. That fear sounds like, "Your boat's filling with water. You're going to die." Or today, "You don't have enough money this month. You will *never* have enough money." "You don't

have friends? You won't. People won't like you." You familiar with this one? It's an ancient voice. The very first words from our enemy are on the first or second page of your Bible [depending on the size of your font], where we were encouraged to doubt the goodness of God, believing he was withholding from us. This is the voice of fear.

So when Jesus stands up to address our question, "God, do you not care that [fill in the blank]?" I *thought*, now hear me, that Jesus' response to me was, "Peace. Hey, I've got you. Come lie down on this cushion with me and wait out the storm." That's not an untrue message, really. In Daniel 3, Jesus shows up with his friends in the middle of the fire and just walks around in the fire with them. I thought the message was going to be, invite Jesus into your great storms with you and you will find peace. That *is* a true message, but there's a different message in this story, and it's been very powerful to me.

The translation we are looking at has Jesus saying, "Peace," to the storm. In the original language, what he says is, "SILENCE!!!!!! Be muzzled!" In other places in Scripture when this phrase is used, it is translated, "You don't get to speak." When our Creator God hears our enemy speaking straight up lies full of fear to us, our God speaks directly to what is causing our fear, "SILENCE! You don't get to speak."

Jesus has given *us* that authority to speak silence to our enemy. He has given us His Spirit so that we might speak to the internal dialogue of fear that torments us with fear of death and lack and worthlessness, "Silence! You don't get to speak." I want you to take those words into your own thought life. Try saying it with me, "Silence! You don't get to speak." When fear starts you in that downward spiral, speak out loud — there's courage in that—"Silence!"

Jesus speaks to that great storm, "Silence! You don't get to speak," and then a great calm settles over the water. How many of us long for a still, internal thought life free from fear. You can hear that this is the longing of your God for you, too! Listen as he turns to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid?" Why are you so afraid? Don't you know your Creator God is right here with you? Don't you know how he cares for you? Don't you know that if you love Jesus, you will not perish, but you will have everlasting life? Why are you so afraid?

And then he asks, "Have you still no faith?" You, friends of Jesus, who have been with him for years and seen his miracles and know his Word and have traveled with him— *still*, do you not have the voice of faith? The Holy Spirit whispers, I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Oh, I am with you always to the very end of the age. You have not been given a spirit of fear but of love and of a sound mind. How deep God's love for you that you should be called a child of God, and so you are. My perfect love drives out fear.

In our 9:00 service, my friend Julie Krilich is going to speak to how Jesus came and silenced, truly brought to end, the internal voice of fear in her life and transformed her by his presence. I remember the run when she had listened to the first talk by Priscilla Shirer in her *Armor of God* series about spiritual warfare. And I remember her giving me side-eye and asking something like, "Do you really believe that? Satan and everything?" She studied herself, and she learned Scripture and her prayer life flourished. She came to recognize the whispers of faith more loudly than the voice of fear. I watched that over a year of running together. Then she moved to California and within her first year, she was right in the middle of the Santa Rosa fires. I saw her in Oakland the day she evacuated. I saw the Great Calm. The presence of Jesus had so transformed she and her family even though the fires raged. She attributes that great calm to learning the words of Jesus that she prays when she's afraid.

When the disciples experience the great calm, their response is, perhaps oddly, great fear. They're more afraid now that it's calm than before when the storm waged. And wouldn't you be? If you

realized you were in a super small boat with someone who just spoke with incredible, supernatural power and with the mere words from his mouth spoke a storm into silence? The original language says— they become afraid with great fear. When you encounter the power of Jesus, C.S. Lewis said you have 3 choices really: call him a liar, deny and disbelieve his power; call him a crazy man; or believe him, worshipping him in awe and fear.

The disciples seem to not be sure at this point in their walk with Jesus. Their response to their great fear is to ask: “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” I have been in the Great Storm, not knowing how to achieve eternal life. I have been saved. I have been in the great storms of this life, and I have experienced the great calm of Jesus silencing the voice of fear and whispering to me the truth of the voice of faith. I have come to know and believe that Jesus is God. He is the Creator. And I worship him. Who do you say Jesus is?

I’m going to lead us in a prayer, speaking to him now. As I walk through these questions again, I invite you to fill in the blank spaces and the silence with your own prayers. He has not changed. He is with you, and he will save you.

Jesus, we come to you and ask, Do you not care that we are, that I am _____?
In the name of Jesus, I command the voice of fear throughout this place to be silent. Be still. You have no authority here.

Holy Spirit, bring great calm.

Jesus, forgive us that we still lack faith to move confidently, believing in your supernatural power and authority. If you want to begin a life of faith today, just pray these words silently between you and God: God, I know I’m helpless. I need you. I need saving. I see that you have the power to save. Save me. Show me who you are. I will follow you.

With no one looking around, every head bowed and every eye closed, if you prayed that prayer right now, I want to ask you would you slip your hand up so that I can see you? It’s a first step of courage that I pray gives you the boldness to share your growing faith in Jesus.

Jesus, you are God, and we know the wind and the waves obey you, and we need you to care for us. We love you. Thank you for saving us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.