

Crossing Over
Mark 4: 35-41
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About three weeks ago a young man walking through a Paris neighborhood to meet up with friends came upon a crowd gathered on the side walk in front of an apartment building. The man looked up to see a four year old child hanging precariously from a fourth floor balcony. Without hesitation, like Spider-man, he scaled the wall in to save the child in less than 30 seconds, using the railings on each balcony to pull himself up to the next floor. The video of the rescue went viral.

In an interview after the rescue the man said: *"I like children, I would have hated to see him getting hurt in front of me. I ran and I looked for solutions to save him."* He later told French President Emmanuel Macron, who met him to thank him personally, that the decision to climb the building had been a spontaneous one. He said: *"I didn't think about it, I climbed up and God helped me."*

Life is risky. One minute we're trucking along thinking everything's under control. We know where we're going. We've planned well, taken appropriate caution to minimize our risks. We've written the script for how our day, or our future will unfold.

Then . . . *BAM*, we're blindsided by an unforeseen turn of events that takes us in a very different direction: perhaps an accident; a terminal diagnosis; a marriage falling apart; the loss of a job or a reputation. Maybe we are served a great injustice. Suddenly we find ourselves living a very different story than the one we had imagined.

Life is not easy, or predictable. I suspect many of us are facing storms in our life. Those storms and challenges assailing us might make us wonder: *Where is God? Doesn't God care?* Today's passage assures us that we're not the only ones asking such questions.

Mark describes a frightening journey that the disciples and Jesus take across the Sea of Galilee. It's not hard to imagine the panic and fear that overwhelmed the disciples as water was swamping the boat. We picture them bailing for their lives, while Jesus sleeps, oblivious to their peril. We can hear the panic and irritation in their voices when they wake him saying: *"Teacher, don't you care that we're perishing?"*

Jesus awakens, but doesn't get drawn into the disciples' anxiety and panic. Rather he rebukes the wind and the waves with the voice that created the universe saying:

“Peace. Be still.” Then eerily there is a dead calm.

With a word, Jesus does for the disciples what they can’t do for themselves. He miraculously delivers them from their peril. With eyes bugged out, they ask a haunting question: *“Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* In this demonstration of Jesus’ power, they catch a vision that they’ve been caught up in a much greater and more mysterious story than they ever imagined when they answered the call to follow Jesus.

4

And so it is for us, who have given over our lives to Jesus. If we’re paying attention we should be asking, *what have we gotten ourselves into!* This life of faith isn’t simply about Jesus rescuing us from the storms, though that is part of it. This life of faith is about Jesus moving us beyond the limits of our small vision, to get us to the other side.

This story invites us to look anew at Jesus with whom we’ve aligned our lives. We’re invited to reflect upon the Jesus we follow, not as one who keeps us from risk, but as the one who may lead us to risk more to get to the other side, knowing that He will never leave us.

Twenty-five years ago the Westminster congregation took a risk to leave the downtown location in West Chester to cross over to the other side beyond the borough. Some of you took part in that crossing over. It wasn’t easy and it wasn’t without encountering a few storms along the way. In the midst of the headwinds, you kept the faith to go with Jesus to this location, which has enabled Christ’s ministry and mission to grow and thrive through you.

As many of you know, we are in the process of discerning a new vision for Westminster’s ministry and mission. You will be hearing more about that on July 29 as the Vision Team share the four God sized dreams that have emerged. These are visions for ministry so big that they can only be accomplished by the power and grace of God with us. They will take us to the other side, leading us to encounter new opportunities for mission and ministry that will stretch out faith and deepen our spiritual formation as Christ’s disciples.

When Jesus and the disciples cross over to the other side they are met immediately by a wild man who lives among the tombs who is possessed by unclean spirits. Rather than fearing the man, Jesus extends compassion, delivering him from his demons. In return the man becomes a witness to the power of God’s love in Jesus, telling his story of redemption and transformation to the surrounding communities. He becomes Jesus disciple in this land of the Gentiles, and so God’s kingdom breaks in.

What lies on the other side waiting for Jesus and his disciples is frightening. I suspect the disciples probably would never have agreed to get in the boat with Jesus had they

been aware of the fierce storm they'd meet along the way or the frightful sight that they'd encounter on the other side. But, had they not crossed over, they would have missed being part of the amazing thing that happens when Jesus enlarges the reach of his mission.

Love motivates Jesus to lead his disciples to the other side: love for the stranger who they'd meet and love for his disciples who he trusts to carry on his mission of love when he is no longer with them. Jesus sets an example for them and for us, that God's love is inclusive and expansive, way larger than our limited love or vision. That love seeks out the stranger, the outsider, the ones who are disrespected and treated as less than human simply because they are different and we fear them.

This story speaks into the fierce storm and chaos happening in our nation and on our southern border as immigrants seeking asylum are undergoing incredible pain as they are separated from their children. More than any of us, they know first hand the painful risk of crossing over to the other side. And yet they still come because the risk of staying where they are is even more frightful.

As Jon said last week when he preached, so I say again: there are no easy answers to solve the immigration crisis we're facing. But what we know is this: Jesus is with us! Jesus is wading into these troubled waters with us to get us to the other side. If only we will but listen for his voice speaking to the winds and the waves of our fears, calming the chaos, and keeping us from abandoning the values of God's kingdom that keep us from going under.

Jesus will lead us over to the other side to join him in extending his love and compassion to our neighbors. The young man who risked his life to save the child dangling from the balcony happens to be an unemployed, immigrant from Mali who was in the right place at the right time and did the right thing. He was integral to God's rescue of that child.

Our well-being is tied to the well-being of our neighbors on the other side and who cross over to our side. We are in this together. Their children are our children and our children are theirs, for we are one-humanity made in the image of God, called to love one another.

There's no storm so fierce nor crisis so hopeless that it is beyond the reach of God's power. We have a God who puts on flesh to join us in our story, in order that we might be caught up into God's bigger story of redemption and restoration of a broken and hurting world through Jesus Christ.

Faith is more than simply trusting Jesus to still the storm. Faith is believing that Jesus will get us to the other side. Faith is simply getting into the boat with Jesus, despite our fears. I leave you with words from writer Frederick Buechner: *“Go...Go for God’s sake, and for your own sake, too, and for the sake of the world. Climb into your little tub of a boat and keep going... [because] Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and...in whatever way we can call on him...to give us courage, to give us hope, to show us our way.”*¹

Amen.

¹ Frederick Beuchner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermon*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).