

Let us Pray.

We are tossed upon the seas of life and we often fear for our safety and our calm. Calm the waters of our troubled minds and grant us grace to be conscious of the peace you bring into our hearts. Amen

Please be seated.

Last week, Chris Levan spoke about the mustard seed and how something so small as a mustard seed could and would grow into a shrub so large that the birds of the air would find shelter in its branches. Chris went on to speak about his experiences in Cuba and how the gift of a single piano donated by someone in Canada, led to the shipment of a seacan-style container, filled with donations of what I believe Chris told us was thirteen pianos, violins, guitars, and other musical instruments sorely needed by the people in Cuba. Under the US embargo in place around Cuba, these items and much more, are in short supply in that island nation.

Out of that gift of faith, one piano given by one individual in this country, the door opened to the beginning of a ministry of love, a ministry which continues to grow even today, with more shipments being made, and still more being planned in the future. Isn't this something like that small mustard seed growing into something much bigger? Out of small blessings, greater gifts will come.

Today, the gospel reading from Mark 4: 35-41, which happens to follow immediately after the parable of the mustard seed, speaks about how faith, fear, and awe are all part of our daily lives.

In this reading, we take a step back from Jesus teaching his disciples, disciples who are busy trying to understand what it is he is saying, and the crowds, the crowd who are known to hang on Jesus' every word,

looking for him to do one more healing, one more amazing act. Jesus is tired out and needs to get away from all this. And so they cross the lake to find some quiet and relaxation.

Now, most of us will be familiar with something which I experience with some degree of regularity in my own life – that being getting tired and needing a rest. Most days, I find I start out in the morning with energy to spare. I am enthusiastic and ready to face what lies before me. As the day wears on, I lose some of my energy and I find I am not as eager to engage with others around me, nor to face the storms of life which seem to find their way into my world. All I want is to find a quiet place, a place to rest, a place to recharge, and a place to have some peace. I need a place to just be myself. Does this sound familiar to you? Have you ever tried to get away from the storms of life? If you have had a similar experience to my own, then you may be able to understand how Jesus was feeling on that day, before the storm on the lake hit.

Before we start trying to figure out what it is scripture is trying to say for us, living in this present day and time, we need to establish the context in which this passage takes place. And here, I am going to divide the context into a series of parts.

Lets begin by looking at the location and the climate around the Sea of Galilee. I want to share with you a little bit of how I understand what the passage is saying about the lake, the surrounding hills, and the weather systems generated by that combination of land, water, and climate.

I grew up in south-western Ontario, a land mass which is largely flat with no mountains to speak off, and only some big hills. The one factor which influences the weather patterns in that part of Canada is the Great Lakes, a group of very large, very deep, very cold bodies of water

which effectively surround southern Ontario. These bodies of water are the weather makers I knew to be the driving forces for what happens year-round in that part of Canada. Strong storms, in summer containing damaging winds, rain, hail, and tornadoes can come up so quickly. To escape from their fury can be nigh on to impossible. On more than one occasion I have been caught out in one of these storms and experienced nature at her worst. And wintertime can be even worse than summertime. With cold air added to the mix.

The Sea of Galilee lies in a 700 foot deep trench which is below sea level and forms a long lake between low mountains which flank the lake on three sides. From a boat on the lake, those mountains would appear to be distant and the lake itself gigantic, and very powerful. And then, there is the weather created by the interaction of the cold mountain air and the warmer moist air, heated by the daytime sun, rising off the lake surface. This mixing of warm moist air rising into the sky and cold air streaming down to replace it, results in the development of huge storms on the lake. Thirty foot waves driven up by gale force winds, accompanied by driving rain which peppered any exposed skin would be a recurring hazard on the lake, any time, any day.

And then, from our gospel story, we hear that Jesus wants the disciples to take him across the lake in a boat. Now, at least four of the disciples had spent much of their lives fishing on that very body of water. They knew it intimately. They knew its dangers, they knew its power, and they thought they had the skills to meet the challenge. The other disciples were less sure about the crossing. They saw the boat and it looked so small to them. Twenty-five feet or so long and maybe six or eight feet across, open to the wind, the rain, and the waves. Was it safe? Did Jesus know what he was asking of them? They may have thought to themselves, maybe it's not safe.

Oh and there was one more thing that would be troubling to the disciples – most of them did not know how to swim. Swimming was not something the average person was taught how to do, back then.

Years ago, I had the experience of being on a cruise ship in the North Atlantic when the waves were in excess of fifty feet, pounding against the hull of our ship. That experience made me very aware of the power of nature around me. I found it hard to sleep, to stand, to walk, and especially to eat anything. I am sure the disciples were having a similar experience.

Remember from our gospel, Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat and the disciples are afraid of the power of the waves, the wind, and the rain which pounded their tiny craft. .... Why is Jesus asleep? They want Jesus awake. They want their leader to take command of the situation and to help save them from certain death.

The disciples have failed here to recognize that their fear goes far beyond the waves, the wind, and the rain. They have failed to recognize the challenge it takes to have faith. You see, having faith is not that simple. Having faith demands that one must face one's own doubts with strength of purpose and courage.

God sent the storm to teach the disciples a lesson in faith, and they still had difficulty understanding what Jesus was all about. Each of us has grace that has been given to us by God. Our Creator wants us to use our gifts to overcome our fear. Fear tells us to expect the worst. Faith tells us that God is in control. Life's problems are a call for us to put our faith into action. Our problems reveal areas of our lives in which we need to act in faith and not fear. Jesus calmed the crashing sea, and He can calm the daily problems we face. He can take the fury out of any situation that we face.

Jesus told the disciples that they would get to their destination. But He did not promise still waters the whole time they journeyed through life. The same is true for us. We have been given the promise of eternal life, and we will get there - and Jesus will be with us through it all. We have lived through the storms of life such as the death of a loved ones. And for some of us, divorce, relationship breakups, shattered dreams, job losses or being spiritually adrift in our own journey. When the storms of life hit us, do we declare that Jesus' promises are null and void, or do we have a faith that will turn that storm into a great calm? When we trust Jesus, He reveals his presence, compassion and control in every storm of life because he cares for us.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for doubting that He could save them. This caused them to fear Him. They realized that He was more powerful than the sea, itself. Only God has power over seas and storms, including the storms of life.

This story reveals both Jesus' power and Jesus as God's agent or God incarnate. Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith, and He does not rebuke us for our lack of faith. Our slight faith has not turned Jesus away.

Sometimes we are like the disciples in this story. We are often in the midst of the storms of life. Sometimes we feel that Jesus has abandoned us. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus is with us in the middle of every storm. When life is difficult, we need to remember that our faith prevails over our fears. The real test is believing Jesus is present even when He is still and quiet. Jesus is still with us. Jesus wants us to know the peace and joy of God's blessing in our lives. Fear has been swallowed up in the saving power of the One sent by the Creator to redeem all humankind. And for this, we shout thanks be to God.

Amen