**“Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?” – Mark 4:35-41**

**Intro**

Every one of us here this morning has likely experienced a situation in life / that caused us to doubt – or disbelieve altogether - something that we formerly thought to be true. Maybe, for you, it was that first Christmas when Santa Claus started to become a “question mark” for you, b/c you went to three different shopping malls in one day, and saw “Santa” at every one of them. Or maybe it was that day in high school /when a classmate was tragically killed in a car accident, and your belief in youthful immortality was taken away. Or maybe you’re here this morning and the truth of a loving God was lost for you at a very young age / when you prayed /with all the faith you could muster/ that mommy and daddy wouldn’t get divorced // and they divorced anyways.

In each of those situations - and a thousand others like them – when the thing we had faith in doesn’t come through for us like we expected it to, we can be left with feelings of deep disappointment, disillusionment, and like we’ve been abandoned. And real - or even apparent - abandonment / especially in a time of desperate need /can deal some of the most devastating blows of all to our faith in something, can’t it?

* Where were you when I needed you?
* How could you let this happen to me?
* Why didn’t you show up when you said you’d be there?

Many of us have cried those same questions into a mirror, or to a person, to the sky, or even to God? And most times – if we get answers back at all – most times those answers are entirely inadequate and unsatisfying.

Well, in our passage this morning in Mark 4, Jesus’ disciples /have just /such an experience. A life-threatening experience that rocks their faith, and causes them to severely doubt – and maybe disbelieve altogether - that this Jesus they’ve given up everything to follow / really has their best interests in mind. That’s nothing new, in light of what we’ve just been thinking about. But what *is* new, is that **the response** the disciples get from Jesus /when they question His love and care for them / *does* answer their question very adequately, *and*, at the same time, completely blows their minds. In fact, Jesus’ response actually causes them to be *more* afraid than they were when they just thought they were going to die. And we’ll talk about why that is as we get into this.

*The responses of Jesus* to the questions that people asked Him in the NT – as Kajle introduced last week – is the whole focus of this sermon series. B/c I think every time Jesus answers a question that someone asks Him, He reveals something more about who He is. And as Kajle also pointed out so well last week, Jesus’ responses also, then, require a response from us as well. Jesus is not just giving us facts to receive. The truth of who *He* is, is meant to transform who *we* are and how *we* live.

As so as we look at this passage this morning then, and Jesus’ response to the disciple’s question, “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?”, I want to talk with you about two things: I want to talk about **true faith** and **the illusion of control.**

By **true faith** I simply mean faith in action; faith that actually acts on the basis of itself, as opposed to just some kind of intellectual assent to a set of facts.

And by **the illusion of control** I’m referring to the way that we all try to set up our lives in a nice, orderly way where we can anticipate every problem and crisis that we may encounter, and handle it as best as possible. After we’ve done that for long enough – all of us know - we can eventually convince ourselves that we are truly the ones in control of our lives. Forgetting / that even a single phone call ///can take our / best laid plans /and smash them to rubble. The belief that we are in control is an illusion. And in our more honest moments, we know it is.

And so, in order to look at those two things in light of Jesus’ response to His disciples, I want to divide our message this morning into just two points: **the context for the question** and then **the response to the question.** (x2).

So if you’ve closed your bibles, please open them again to Mark 4, and let’s get after this together.

So, let’s begin by looking at

1. **The context for the question – vs. 35-38**

This may seem like an odd place to begin, not b/c we think the context for the question is unimportant, but b/c it’s basically self-evident. You’re probably thinking,   
“Ummm … the context for the question, “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?” is the disciples // in a boat // drowning. I mean, are we missing something more there, or …?” Well there is something more there I think actually, again, particularly as we consider **true faith** and **the illusion of control.** B/c what I want us to consider is that Jesus is not just *responding* to a question that comes out of some random contextual circumstance; no no, the reality is that Jesus has *also* – before the beginning of time - *shaped* the context in which the question will be asked. Do you think that storm on the lake was a surprise to Jesus?

So as we look at the context for the question here, what I want you to see is how Jesus is the One who is truly in control, and how He has shaped these events in the life of His disciples /in order to grow true faith in them.

Now, Mark sets the scene for us here beginning in vs. 35 – look with me there. He writes **(read vs. 35, 36)** Now, earlier in ch. 3, we learn that Jesus in in Galilee teaching large crowds of people down by the lake, which is actually the Sea of Galilee; the beginning of ch. 4 tells us that Jesus is, once again, doing the same thing here.

By saying “when evening came” there in vs. 35, what that means is that Jesus has actually been down by the shore here/ teaching all day long.

Now, Just being at the beach, in the heat of the sun all day long, can suck the energy right out of you. Beyond that, any of you who are teachers or public speakers will know that teaching for a whole day, to large crowds and with no microphone, is also both mentally and vocally exhausting.

That’s why we read that, when Jesus has had enough, he tells His disciples at the end of v**s. 35** to take Him over to the other side. This is also why, btw, we find Jesus later in this story – in vs. 38 - in the back of the boat, crashed right out on a cushion. In fact, all of the gospel writers - in various different ways – seek to show the divinity of Jesus, and also, the true humanity of Jesus. Jesus has been teaching large crowds all day out in the hot sun, as His very real, tangible human body /is exhausted.

Now, the disciples actually still don’t know a great deal about Jesus. They have been called by Him to follow, and they’ve also seen Him do some amazing miracles and teach with great wisdom and authority. So they know enough, at least, to follow His instructions when He tells them to take Him over to the other side. Besides that, many of them were seasoned fishermen, and so this would not have been a difficult request in the least. So, in **vs. 36** there we read that they all head out, with a few other boats, to the other side.

And it’s worth noting as well, many of these details Mark includes in this story: taking Jesus “just as He was” in the boat, saying that there were other boats with them, telling us that Jesus was asleep on a cushion. Many scholars – Christian and secular – agree that these details verify that this is a first hand account, and not a made up tale. The reason being, b/c Mark gives us details that, really, have nothing to do with the story; from a literary standpoint in particular, they don’t advance the narrative and they also never show up again. And so what we have here is just a verbatim description of what happened. So, it’s not everything by a long shot, but things like that, I think, are some of the smaller pieces that should help you build a confidence in the truthfulness of this bible we’re reading.

So Jesus and the disciples all head out together in these boats to the other side of the lake. And then in vs. 37 we read this – look with me there **(read vs. 37).** So this massive storm comes, seemingly, from nowhere and – basically – begins to sink the boat. The location of the Sea of Galilee, scholars tell us, is about 700’ below sea level, and is very close to Mt. Hermon which is about 3000’ above sea level; all of this working together to create violent windstorms on the Sea of Galilee. And yet, we still don’t get a picture of the severity of this storm until vs. 38 where we see that the storm is so bad, that these seasoned sailors believe they are going to drown. Look at vs. 38 with me. We read this **(read vs. 38).**

So there we have the question asked of Jesus in the context of this storm: “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?”

I don’t know about you, but drowning has always been one of the ways I am most fearful of dying. Kajle said last week, as a kid he used to sit around looking at people and imagining the lives they had. As a kid, my friends as I would sit around discussing what would be the worst way to die. And after we got past the silly, fantastical answers, drowning would always be near the top of almost everyone’s list. And I think what makes it so terrifying is that – beyond the anticipation of knowing your death is coming – there is also an act of the will involved /where you have to take that first painful breath-full of water.

And here / in this sinking boat on the Sea of Galilee, these men are now feeling like this is about to be their fate. And yet, even as all of this is going on, the disciples look at the back of the boat and see Jesus – this miracle working Teacher they’ve left everything to follow – asleep. *Asleep!*  and seemingly indifferent do their impending deaths. And in a tone found nowhere but in Mark’s gospel, the disciples cry out to Jesus in desperation and, really, incredulous exasperation, “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?” The Greek here could also be translated, “Jesus, isn’t it important to you that we’re drowning?”

**App**

And I know that many of you in here this morning, read a description like that // and you can identify with the disciples all too well. I know I can. The waves of life, or poor health, or depression, or relational strain, or financial strain are pouring over you / threatening to sink you - and although you’ve prayed for days or weeks or even years, Jesus seems peacefully asleep at the back of your boat // indifferent to your suffering and impending collapse. And like the disciples, you finally cry out to Jesus in frustrated, incredulous tones, “Jesus! Don’t you care that I’m drowning here?!? Why aren’t you *doing* something to rescue me?” Haven’t you ever been mad at God before?

And yet, as one commentator on this passage pointed out, the only problem with that question is that it begins with a false premise: the disciples in this moment, along with each one of us in our distress, began with the premise that, if God really loved me, He would never let anything bad happen to me. And the big flaw in that line of thinking is in forgetting that the starting point of God’s plan to save you was in planning the death of His Son.

This is where that **illusion of control** comes in. We all have this very clear road map of what life should look like, that we want to hand to God and have him sign off on. And the big problem there is that we forget that we aren’t God, and that isn’t at all how God works! Tim Keller said it so well when he wrote, “If Jesus is God, the He’s got to be great enough to have reasons to let you go through some things you can’t understand.” You see what he’s saying? He’s saying that if the reality of God loving you /means that you need to be able to understand everything God allows you to go through / then what you’re really saying is that God’s standard of goodness and loving has to conform to *yours*, or God isn’t loving. You can say that, but just be honest about the fact that that’s what you’re saying; that’s God’s standard of love is not as good or perfect as your own.

And as it relates to **true faith**, realize that it’s very easy to look faithful and mature when you’re surrounded by other mature faithful people. But fear/pain/suffering/persecution; they all have a very effective way of revealing the true nature of your faith, and the true status of your maturity. And I believe that is Jesus’ whole purpose in allowing this storm into His disciples’ lives, and into our lives as well. Jesus wants to do two things by allowing storms into our lives: to reveal the present deficiencies in our faith, and also to grow a true faith in us. (x2)

I tell you, as we witness a growing secularism in North America in particular, the danger - for instance – of having our charitable status as churches stripped from us; we will very quickly see who is giving to the church out of a true faith that seeks to further the kingdom of God, and who is giving for the tax receipt.

I confess, in my own life even, Barton’s resignation as lead pastor here, has revealed a deficiency in my faith, where I’ve come to see I was trusting too much in Barton’s leadership for the health and direction of this church, and not enough on the true leadership of Jesus Christ.

But that is the key: seeing the storms and trials of life as tools of God to grow true faith in me will cause me to see them one way. Seeing the storms and trials of life as random crises that God is unwilling or unable to protect me from, will cause me to see them very differently.

Well, now that we’ve looked at the context for the question, I want us to spend the remainder of our time now looking at Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question. So let’s look at:

1. **The response to the question – vs. 39-41**

The truth is – while it looks like Jesus just gives one response to the disciple’s question, we actually see two responses here in this text.

The **first response** of Jesus to the disciple’s question, “Don’t you care if we drown?” is to actually quiet the storm/to remove the circumstances causing the fear. Look at vs. 39 with me. The disciples wake up Jesus in their distress and, really, rebuke Him for His indifference to their suffering. And Jesus does this, vs. 39 **(read vs. 39).** So Jesus stands up in the middle of this storm and says, “Knock it off!” to the wind and the waves /// and they do it! They listen to Him. In the Greek, the translation of “Be still!” could also be translated, “Be muzzled!” which is very similar to the way Jesus speaks when He casts out demons. This is not, however, to lead us to believe that this storm is somehow demonic or sent by Satan. In both cases, what is meant to be displayed is Jesus’ absolute authority; His authority over the demonic world, as well as over His creation.

And what we see revealed in this first response of Jesus is that He is **sovereign**; He is in absolute control, *and* that He is also **a present help in trouble**. Jesus’ response is meant to give the disciples then, and us today, a picture of God’s absolute control over whatever circumstances we may face, which should give us confidence. And His response is also meant to show us His nearness, which should give us comfort.

If there is a dog barking at my girls and scaring them, for instance; if I go over and grab the dog by the collar, and put it back in it’s yard behind the fence, they see that I have both the ability to rescue them *and* that my presence with them provides them with the possibility of protection when they face trouble. What I want to grow in my daughters, then – and what Jesus is growing in His disciples here - is a **true faith;** a faiththat doesn’t just believe that dad “could” help out in danger, but a true faith that actually creates a confidence in them / that my presence with them *means* protection for them, even if danger does come.

Now, look right at me. That doesn’t it *any* way mean that Jesus is going to deliver us out of every storm we face in life. He doesn’t promise to do that anywhere in the bible. In our limited, finite view of life’s trials, we have to somehow reconcile between the truth of God’s ability to heal and deliver, and the truth that in Gethsemane, when Jesus asked the Father that this cup might pass from Him, He said “no”. The **true faith** that God intends to grow in us then, is the faith of the three Hebrew exiles had, who stood before king Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, facing execution in the fiery furnace. So that, whatever we face in life we could say, like them, “the God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and He will deliver us, but even if He doesn’t, we will serve Him alone.”

The **second response** of Jesus to the disciples’ question, we see in vs. 40, and it’s the one we see more properly as a response to the question b/c it’s directed at them. Look with me at vs. 40. After calming the storm and removing the danger, Jesus says, **(read vs. 40).**

Now, at first glance, this sounds kinda harsh to us. Like the disciples maybe, we hear Jesus’ rebuke, “Why are you so afraid?” and think, “…. Are you kidding me? Why was I so afraid? Ummmm … b/c I was about to die?!”

But this misses the truth that Jesus is not saying that the disciples should not have been afraid *at all*. No no, what Jesus is rebuking the disciples for is for being *so afraid* that it caused them to doubt His power and sufficiency to recue them. Note, in the midst of their distress, the disciples didn’t come to Jesus and plead with Him to rescue them. They came to Him with unbelief and accusation at His indifference to their plight, and His inability to rescue them.

Here, again, is the **true faith** that Jesus intended to grow in His disciples, as well as in us today. A faith that will come to God with the trust and belief in His goodness to actually do what we are asking of Him. Jesus’ brother James speaks of this coming to God in faith in the beginning of his letter when he writes, “If any one fo you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all w/o finding fault, and it will be given to him. But, *when* he asks, he must believe and not doubt, b/c he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind [you have to wonder if James had this story from Mark’s gospel in mind when he wrote this]. That man [says James] should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.”

And so Jesus’ asking the disciples if they “still have no faith”, is not asking them if they don’t believe He has power to save them. He is asking, “Do you still not have a faith that translates into action? That translates into an unshakable trust in Me?”

See, what that means for you and me today, for example, is that an intellectual assent to the truth that Jesus loves me, is actually useless, *unless* that belief translates into a steadfast hope that God loves me, even when the circumstances of life seem to prove otherwise.

Just as a belief that planes can fly is a useless belief unless I put action to that belief and actually get on the plane.

And then, finally, where the **illusion of control** comes in here is in the disciples’ response to Jesus’ response. Look at vs. 41 with me. When they thought they were going to drown, the disciples were afraid, now – when Jesus calms the storm – we read in vs. 41 **(read vs. 41).**

You see the storm made the disciples feel out of control and afraid. Seeing Jesus’ ultimate power over the thing that had *made* them feel out of control, makes them feel even less in control, and it terrifies them. And they say to each other, “Who is this?!? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

What they missed, however – and what we often miss today as well – is that they imagined that when Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves /He was only controlling them *then*, and not before as well. B/c remember, who was it that decided they should all head over to the other side of the lake?

Now that doesn’t mean this was some kind of divine, juvenile prank that Jesus was pulling on His disciples; pretending to sleep but really watching them through one eye. Or that God the Father was up in heaven being like, “Gabriel, Moses – come over here and check this out! Watch what Jesus is gonna do here; they’re totally gonna be freaked out!”

Jesus had an intentional plan in mid when He led His disciples out into that storm; knowing exactly what that storm would reveal in them, and also what He wanted to work into them through it.

And what we desperately need to see, in the midst of all the storms of life, is that – even as the storm rages and the waves wash over our boat, God is still on His throne, and what He allows has purpose and is not random at all.

And no, I don’t stand up here and claim for a second that we’re always going to understand what that purpose is. The truth is, I’ve been through many difficult circumstances in my life that I have no clue what purpose they were achieving. Sometime we see the purpose, but not that often, and even then, we’re probably only seeing a fraction of the whole picture.

But the point is, we continue to live under the **illusion of control** when we demand that God’s standards of love and care must line up with our own. How much better to submit our lives and our wills to a God who is *actually* in control and working everything for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. In doing that, we can then begin to develop a **true faith** that can stand against any storms that we may face.

Or as John Piper said so well, “After calming the sea, Jesus asked His disciples, ‘Why are you afraid?’ Not b/c Christians never drown. But b/c they are safe in drowning.”

**Conclusion**

As I studied this passage, one of the things that kept coming up over and over again was the many parallels between what we read in Mark 4, and the story of Jonah in the OT.

Jonah - if you don’t know the story – was a prophet sent by God to preach to the people of Nineveh. But Jonah hated the Ninevites and so – instead of going where God told him to – got on a ship going the exact opposite direction. But then – listen closely to this - God sends a storm that batters and tosses the ship so much so that even the experienced sailors on board believe they are going to drown. As all that is happening, Jonah is asleep and must be awoken by the terrified sailors. Jonah tells them that they must throw him into the sea, and when they do, the storm dies down and the sea becomes instantly calm. And the result is that the sailors are now even more terrified than they were before.

Does any of that sound familiar to you? In many cases, we see exact parallels to our passage this morning, except for the fact that Jesus doesn’t throw Himself into the sea in order to calm the storm as Jonah did. But then again … I wonder if we look at the gospel story with more of a wide-angle lens, there aren’t even more parallels than we thought.

Consider, in Matthew’s gospel, just before Mark’s in the NT, Jesus refers to Himself as “the One who is greater than Jonah”. He also referred to His death and resurrection as “the sign of Jonah.”

In his book entitled *King’s Cross* which is a study of the book of Mark, Tim Keller powerfully draws the parallels between Jesus and Jonah together, by pointing out that - just as Jonah told the sailors in the boat, basically, if I perish, you will live - so Jesus came that He might be thrown into the great sea of sin and death and perish on our behalf, so that He might calm the raging sea of God’s wrath against a sinful mankind. And then Keller writes this:

*“If the sight of Jesus bowing His head into the ultimate storm is burned into the core of your being, you will never say, ‘God, don’t you care?’ And if you know that He did not abandon you in that ultimate storm, what makes you think He would abandon you in the much smaller storms you’re experiencing right now?”*

What we see in the response of Jesus to His disciples’ question, “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?” is that – first of all - Jesus is **utterly in control/sovereign**, and He’s **a present help** in all the storms and trials we face in life. But more than that, Jesus’ response to His disciples’ question reveals that He is also **a Discipler,** who will use all and any means necessary in order to remove the illusion of control from us and build true faith in us.

It’s summed up so well in a quote I love form J.I Packer who said,

*“And still He seeks the fellowship of His people, and sends both joys and sorrows to detach their hands from the things of this world and attach them unto Himself.”*

To “remove our hands from the things of this world” is how Jesus helps remove the **illusion of control** in our lives. And “attaching our hands unto Himself” that’s the way Jesus builds **true faith** in each one of us.

Let’s pray.