

*The Calming Gift of Peace*  
*Mark 4:35-41*

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We have a wonderful scripture passage for the sermon today. Our story comes from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter in the Gospel of Mark. It is a familiar story. Jesus travels in a boat with his disciples after being with a crowd of people. He falls asleep on a cushion at the stern of the boat and a storm arises. Waves beat on the boat filling it with water and the disciples fear the boat will be swamped. They wake Jesus up and say to him: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, saying: "Peace! Be still!" Scripture tells us that the wind ceased and the water became "dead calm." Jesus then turned to his disciples and said, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The disciples were filled with a great awe and wondered to each other "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

As we look at this scripture from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, the story of the storm is a metaphor. Scripture invites us to examine how we respond to the storms of life. Will we respond with fear or with faith? As people of faith, the story encourages us to listen for Jesus' guidance - to listen for peace and to live from that place of calm.

Many storms in life are external. Throughout our life time storms arise because of social, political or environmental circumstances. These storms can impact our lives and change them significantly. Just the other day I was talking with someone who lost everything because of the hurricane last summer. She, her husband and her children have moved back to the northeast to live with her mother and begin their lives all over again. When events in life happen, we are required to regroup and figure out how to live our lives. As people of faith, our scripture invites us to respond to these circumstances with faith - to seek Jesus' peace rather than become trapped in our own fear.

We've been in a particularly difficult storm this past week as we've learned of 2400 children who were separated from their parents while entering our country along our southern border. It has been disheartening to learn that they were separated from their parents without proper identification and sent to a variety of holding facilities around our country - some too young to know their names. It has been disheartening to hear the Mayor of New York City tell the story of learning that about 200 of these children were being held in a facility in

Harlem and he didn't even know they were there. While visiting the detainment center, he discovered that one of the children was about 9 months old. It is disheartening to learn from child psychologists and other experts that these children might never recover from the trauma of separation.

It is natural to be fearful and worried about what is happening to the children even as the whole story of immigration and migration around the globe is complex and deeply challenging.

Instead of responding with fear and anger, Jesus invites us to another way. Jesus invites us to follow his way of peace and compassion. Somewhere I have read that the opposite of peace is not war, but fear. We are invited to respond to life's storms as people of peace.

When we listen for Jesus' instruction and trust his way of being in the world, we encounter a place of inner peace. We can then act in the way our hearts and minds guide us. I read where one couple saw the photo of a crying toddler that made them think about their own two-year-old daughter. Out of compassion for the child and others like her, they decided to create a fundraiser on Facebook to raise money for RAICES - Refugee and Immigrants Center for Education and Legal Services. They hoped to raise \$1,500. By this past Friday, they had raised almost 19 million and almost 500,000 people made donations averaging \$38. The money will be used to help reunite families, provide legal and educational services and counseling. Out of compassion for the children, they established a way for over a half million people to share their concern and care.

Some of the storms we encounter in life are internal. We can carry within ourselves a sense of inadequacy or incompleteness and fear we don't have the right skills or education or family history or money or any number of other things to live life well. This feeling can send us into a spiral of fear that can create an inner storm.

As a spiritual director, I spend most of my time caring for other ministers. Ministers tend to feel like they need to fix the issues of the world. They tend to feel burdened by the demands of their congregations and can feel like they do not have the skills for an affective ministry. In a time of self-doubt, the inner storm can feel significant.

I was talking with a minister the other day. We were reflecting on his work, his understanding of The Holy and thinking through what it was like to serve two small churches - churches that weren't doing things to change the world but quietly living out the sacred story of peace and compassion. His ministry is in a denomination that stresses social action and social change. Being a

pastor for these churches can feel disconnected from the goals of his denomination. At one point, he told me his understanding of God's universal love for all people. He said he liked to think of God as the ocean and each of us is a wave on the ocean. The wave might be a huge 50-foot wave, or it might be a small, quiet wave, but all waves come from the ocean, stay connected to the ocean and return to the ocean. God is always connected to each of us whoever we are. After listening, I asked him what it was like to know that he was one of those waves. He said: "I'm just so glad I don't have to be the ocean!"

Often the inner storms of our lives get resolved when we realize we don't have to be everything to everybody, but we can be the glorious people we were born to be. People of faith and peace.

Finally, when you find yourself in a storm it is very helpful to take some time to be quiet and pray. There is a lovely prayer called a meta meditation that was taught to us a few years ago by Rami Shapiro. It is a way to pray for peace in the midst of the storm - a way to pray for yourself, your family and friends and for the world.

May I be freed from fear  
May I be freed from compulsion  
May I be blessed with peace  
May I be blessed with love.

May you be freed from fear  
May you be freed from compulsion  
May you be blessed with peace  
May you be blessed with love.

May we be freed from fear  
May we be freed from compulsion  
May we be blessed with peace  
May we be blessed with love.

If you pray it over and over again for yourself, for others and for our nation and the world, you will find that the gift of Christ's peace and calm begins to dwell in your hearts. This peace helps to navigate the storms of life.

May you be freed from fear  
May you be freed from compulsion  
May you be blessed with peace  
May you be blessed with love. Amen.