

**Riding the Storms with Jesus—Mark 4:35-41**  
*5th Sunday after Pentecost—June 23, 2024*

Have you experienced that, thinking you've done enough and then the dismay and disappointment of realizing you've only gone part way. Someone I knew some years back, had that experience. Miriam got in the boat, but it wasn't enough. The situation relates to the relationship with her daughter Nicole. Nicole had been diagnosed autistic in adulthood. It came as great relief to them both as it explained so much about Nicole's childhood—all the misunderstandings, confusion and disappointments. Miriam, having had no awareness of autism had seen Nicole as difficult and often manipulative when the child tried to have her needs met. When Nicole threw temper tantrums as a child because she insisted on leaving birthday parties shortly after arriving, she was seen as selfish. In reality she was just over-stimulated by the noise and social interaction. When Nicole refused to wear the sweater grandma had knit, she was seen as ungrateful and uncooperative. In reality, she was reacting to an unimaginable (to her mom) sensitivity to textures on her skin. Miriam and Nicole had a new awareness, a new understanding. They were in the autism boat together. But soon it became clear this wasn't enough for Nicole.

The past had taken a toll. Through a repeated pattern of needs being minimized and unmet Nicole learned the people in her life could not be trusted to take her seriously. Further, she had internalized the belief that it was not worth the effort or the eventual heartbreak to ask for her needs to be met. So even with the knowledge of the diagnosis, Nicole would become very upset when she stepped into the kitchen and was struck by an overwhelming smell of onions cooking because Miriam hadn't turned the vent fan on. She would become furious and feel disrespected when Miriam would forget to give her notice when family plans changed. Miriam said those early days were terrible. It hadn't been enough to get in the boat with Nicole. Nicole was inviting her to something more, something deeper, more fulfilling.

I think that's what Jesus is doing in our story. First though, some context is needed. Just before this story, Mark has reported Jesus' parables of the sower (4:3-9, 13-20), the seed growing secretly (4:26-29), and the mustard seed (4:30-32). Then they get an explanation of the sower parable. Jesus tells them, only those who are ready to hear and to see will understand Jesus' parables. The disciples are feeling pretty tight with Jesus as keepers of this God knowledge. Jesus treats them as privileged insiders.<sup>1</sup> Jesus knows there's also a danger in this, so he invites them on a short little cruise. We know what happens next, leading to the questions, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The self satisfaction of faith as privileged knowledge is replaced with a sense of failure and a challenge to reflection. So yes, the questions imply "it's not enough to just get in the boat with me" faith isn't a head game, a club for those who understand. The

---

<sup>1</sup> William Loader, *First Thoughts on Year B Gospel Passages from the Lectionary Pentecost 5*, <https://billloader.com/MkPentecost5Ord12.html>

questions and dejection that follow are an emptying out of all the spiritual arrogance that sits in the disciple's souls so that they can hear the invitation to something more—a deeper, transformational faith.

Miriam heard a similar invitation from Nicole, to empty herself of the self-satisfaction of merely understanding for something deeper, transformational. Nicole's behaviours weren't personality defects but real needs seeking understanding and a compassionate response. Miriam began to trust Nicole's needs and to see the world through her eyes. So, Miriam stopped getting her back up when Nicole asked her to wear ear buds instead of playing music on a speaker. Miriam gave her daughter grace when she expressed the need to leave large family gatherings earlier than everyone else. With Miriam's new sensibilities and changes in behaviour, Nicole began to trust her mom. Instead of becoming upset, moody and angry she learned to express her needs in the confidence that she would be met with compassion and respect. Nicole could trust her mom because, Miriam didn't just get in the boat with Nicole she rode out the storms with her, in faith that something more, something deeper, something transformational awaited them.

For most of us, this journey with Jesus starts with some form of understanding, some with a set of beliefs based on the contents of the bible. Some question those beliefs and begin to de-construct them by reading and taking courses from people who use the tools of science and social science to understand scripture intellectually, as myth and metaphor imbedded with meaning. But, if the journey with Jesus leaves us feeling smug and self-satisfied, it might be because we've contented ourselves with the comfort of belonging to a club of righteous believers or the smugness of intellectual understanding. We're being invited to something more. We're being invited to get on the boat and take the risky journey to another shore. That journey will be risky because a deep awareness of the love of God made known in Jesus calls us to new sensibilities, new behaviours, new ways of being in the world that will alter our relationships, our finances and our politics, to name the big three.

I wonder if you can think of such times in your own life? A time when you got in the boat with Jesus even when you knew a storm might be coming? I remember a woman in a previous congregation whose faith turned her into a whistleblower at a major corporation. It happens every time we decide to stick by someone through grief, physical or mental illness, disability, addiction and more. I think back to the Inclusive Ministries service a few weeks back and how Parkminster voted to become an affirming church years ago when it was a lot riskier than it is today. Allen Switzer shared how close the vote was and how much fear was expressed. At that same service, I remember the story of Marion Mutton going to the General Council meeting of 1988 and voting against the wishes of the congregation to support the ordination of what we then referred to as Gay people.

Those are some stormy waters, and we'll feel alone at times and wonder despairingly where the Holy One is amid it all. It is natural to despair but perhaps we could also see in it the grief of emptying ourselves of familiar and comfortable ways of being for the

sake an invitation to a more meaningful and ultimately transformational faith. Lived trust in the Love of God doesn't make all the pain, uncertainty, injustice and tragedy go away. Faith rather points the way, through the storms. Mark knows that, Jesus, the one who rebukes the skies, cries out in despair on the cross.<sup>2</sup> It's always a risk getting in that boat with Jesus and riding out the storm with the Holy One as our guide, not knowing which shore we'll land on. The shore is safer, but as the song goes, we'll never walk on water if we're not prepared to drown, body and soul need a soaking from time to time. You might say, "well, I don't want to walk on water." Just like the story today, that line isn't about performing wonders, it's about an invitation to union with God, it's about loving as God loves in our families, our workplaces, our church, our community, our lives. In humility and trust let's accept that invitation.

Rev. Joe Gaspar

---

<sup>2</sup> Loader