

“Jesus at the Center of the Storm”

Date: June 24, 2018 **Place:** Lakewood UMC **Occasion:** 5th Sunday After Pentecost **Texts:** Mark 4:35-41; 2 Corinthians 21b-30 **Theme:** Problems, trust, faith, Jesus’ power

Chippie-the-parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage, the next he was sucked in, washed up and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean Chippie’s cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said “hello” when “ssssopp!” Chippie got sucked in.

The bird’s owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum cleaner and opened the bag. There was Chippie, still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust, hair and all that stuff inside a dust bag, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom.

She turned on the tap and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do... she reached for her hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, a friend who had heard about Chippie’s troubles contacted the owner to see how the bird was recovering. “Well,” she replied, “Chippie doesn’t sing much anymore, he just sits and stares.”

Who can blame him? Sucked in, washed up and blown over.... That’s enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart. Things happen in *our* lives that come along unexpectedly and we end up feeling like Chippie – sucked in, washed up and blown over – the song stolen from our hearts.

I believe there are very few here this morning who couldn't stand up and tell a story about some aspect of their lives when they feel a bit like the disciples did in the gospel lesson this morning – afraid and vulnerable, with a decidedly sinking feeling!

You know what it's like to feel as though you are in the middle of a storm - tossed this way and that, and you wonder how you're ever going to get to calmer waters. From time to time, life can treat us as roughly as poor Chippie the parakeet. So what can we learn from this boat ride in the storm?

First, we learn that storms can come suddenly. It had been a memorable afternoon. From far and near people had gathered to hear Jesus tell them about the Kingdom of God. He told them the kingdom was like a farmer who went out to sow seeds. He compared the Kingdom to the small mustard seed, which becomes a giant plant.

He told them many stories, but the day was now fast passing and it was time to depart. Jesus told his disciples they must go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Surely the disciples must have questioned his decision. Why leave now? They were on the verge of success; here on *this* side was where the people were.

On the other side are only Gerasenes; they were pagans. But the disciples did as Jesus instructed. They set sail that beautiful afternoon on the Sea of Galilee. The sun was shining and Jesus, weary from the day's activity, falls asleep.

As the late afternoon faded into dusk, trouble began to loom. The white puffy clouds that dotted the sky were replaced by low-hanging, bilious black clouds. The tranquil waters began to churn with white caps and then large waves that slammed the side of the tiny boat.

The Sea of Galilee was notorious for these sudden and violent squalls. The disciples must have thought that when Jesus told them to cross over to the other side, Jesus had led them to their destruction, not their salvation. This storm had come quickly and it threatened their lives.

Let me tell you something. Trouble can come just that fast in your life. Everything can be going beautifully, people can be congratulating you; things can be going your way. Then, all of a sudden, the telephone can ring and everything in your life can be turned upside down.

The police call, "There's been an accident." The doctor calls, "Your test results have come back and I'd like to see you as soon as possible." You're watching the nightly news and you can't believe what you're hearing. It doesn't take long for the storms to come.

And they can come quickly. The apostle Paul experienced it. In the passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul is telling that church how much he has suffered on behalf of the Gospel. I'm not sure what the quarrel was in that church, but some folks were boasting and I assume acting superior to the other Christians in that church. Paul chooses to boast also, but instead of his greatness, he boasts about his sufferings.

He tells them about the frequent floggings he has suffered, how he had been beaten, arrested and once even stoned but not to death. He described his perils at sea, on rivers, in danger from bandits. He has suffered hunger and thirst, lack of sleep, nakedness and peril.

He boasts not to say how great he is, but to say that in his weakness, God's strength, love and care have prevailed. The first thing we learn is that storms can come quickly. The second thing we learn is that God cares about us in the midst of the storm.

God did not take away all of the trials and problems and storms in the Apostle Paul's life. But God was present with Paul in every one of those difficult situations. So let's get back to our story with Jesus and the disciples out on the storm-tossed waters of the Sea of Galilee.

Peter, Andrew, James and John, all were fishermen whom Jesus had recruited for ministry. They had spent their lives fishing this body of water. They knew how dangerous it was to be out in the middle of lake; families and friends across Galilee no doubt harbored horror stories of the life-silencing drama of these waters.

But Jesus had insisted. They would have preferred to keep close to shore, where they could get back to safe harbor quickly. But Jesus wanted to go to the other side; he had other ministry to do. Jesus was not going to play it safe. Jesus took the risk of traveling across open water at night.

Knowing the terrors of the sea, knowing that not all who put out into open waters return home safely, the disciples are now terrified. They jump back to the stern of the boat only to find Jesus asleep. He doesn't even know that a storm is raging. He can't even hear the howl of the wind. He doesn't even feel the waves crashing into the side of the boat.

Doesn't he care? "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Maybe you've asked that same question. "Doesn't God care about what I'm going through?" My friends, you may not like what I'm about to say, but you need to hear this. Jesus does not promise to calm every storm in your life. Jesus does promise to calm you in every storm of life.

Perhaps you thought it would be smooth sailing with Jesus. Perhaps, you thought that with Jesus in the boat, there would be no storm, no waves, and no fear. But nowhere in any of the gospels do I ever hear Jesus

say, "Trust in me and all your problems will simply disappear." Time and time again I hear him utter these words, "Fear not, for I am with you."

So let me ask you, does your faith enable you to face forward in life? Or do your doubts and fears keep you looking backwards over your shoulders, expecting the worst to befall you? Can you trust God to be with you, not only in the best of times, but also in the worst of times?

My friends, if we expect God to take away all of life's problems, we will be sorely disappointed. But if we trust that God is at work in whatever happens, advancing His Kingdom even when it looks bleak or impossible, we will find peace and courage to endure whatever befalls us.

If I believe that I must face life's difficulties and problems, using only my limited knowledge, strength and courage, I soon become quickly overwhelmed. But when I trust that God is with me, in the boat, caring about me and caring about the outcome of my life, I can face any adversity.

There was a woman in a community who was well known for her simple faith and great calm in the midst of many trials. Another woman who had never met her, but who had heard about her quiet peace, came to visit one day. "I must find out the secret of her calm, happy life," she thought to herself.

As she met her, she said, "So, you are the woman with the great faith I've heard so much about." The other woman replied, "No, I am not the woman with the great faith. But I am the woman with a little faith in a great God."

I leave you with my two simple points. First, be reminded that storms can come quickly. And two, Jesus doesn't care about the storm, but Jesus cares very much about you. Have faith. Trust him more, every day. Don't wait till the big storms come, but build your trust, day by day. Amen.