

“A Living Faith: God Shows Up”

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Mark 4:35-41

Soren was twenty years old when he got married to his high school sweetheart, but he acknowledges that at that time he was immature, a bit reckless and not so ready to be married. As you might expect, their first year of marriage was very rocky.

Soren and his wife chose to separate, and for three months Soren went back to the riotous life of a single young man, playing with a band in local bars, partying, and drinking a lot.

One day, he resolved in his heart that he had been crazy to get married in the first place because this was the kind of life he wanted.

In the middle of that same night, Soren woke straight up out of a dead sleep thinking “What in the heck am I doing? I’m screwing up my marriage, and I’m screwing up my life.”

So right then, in the middle of the night, he called his wife. She answered his call and he went over to see her and they immediately

hugged and cried and began talking about how to reconcile their relationship.

Afterward, he learned that later that day his wife was planning to file divorce papers because she was quite certain that their relationship was completely lost.

Something happened to Soren that night that altered the way he looked at life. He now talks about that middle-of-the-night wake up call as a point when God showed up and he experienced a radical transformation of his heart. It was an important point of maturity and growth.

It was at this crucial point that he first chose to live for God.

His wife forgave him, but Soren still regrets the three months of immature, self-centered living that led him to abandon his wife and hurt her so deeply.

Looking back, now 20 years after their three-month separation, Soren says that God has helped him use that painful experience for good.

He and his wife now have a personal story of redemption and have reaffirmed how important it is to place a high priority on their marriage commitment.

Just when they needed a miracle to get them through a tumultuous time, they witnessed God showing up. They both now believe that they can overcome anything they face with God's strength.

Listen to a story about Jesus and his close friends in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee.

READ MARK 4:35-41

The Sea of Galilee is called a "sea," but it's only a bit bigger than a large inland lake in mid Michigan. You can easily see the other side and imagine taking perhaps several hours to cross by boat with a decent breeze.

But due to the mountainous terrain around the Sea of Galilee and specific weather patterns, when a storm hits, boats can be tossed around on the water and be capsized by large waves.

Adding to the tension in this story, with the exception of people like Peter who were fisherman, the Jews were not so much a seafaring people. They liked their feet planted firmly on solid ground where they were safe.

The Jews had created all kinds of folklore about the sea. It was from the depths of a dark sea that monsters emerged.

The foreboding evil of the sea destroyed war ships like they were toothpicks and consumed whole armies for lunch.

The Greek word for storm "lailaps" communicated this dark and treacherous idea. The same word is translated "whirlwind" in other places in scripture and has an overtone of demonic power.

In this story, Mark was communicating that Jesus had authority over the forces of nature as well as any other power in the world, no matter how strong, how evil, or how fearful it made people.

Jesus' friends certainly had a reason to fret over the terrible "evil" storms of the sea. I imagine you or I would probably do the same, especially if we grew up with the the dark sea fables like they did.

Jesus' friends believed that he could do many miraculous things. Perhaps we do as well. But they also had a front row seat to watch Jesus in person perform miracles and defy the laws of nature and physics on numerous occasions. There was no doubt that they believed he could help them in that storm, in that time of evil ... but he happened to be sleeping, it would seem, on a rather soft and comfortable cushion.

Even though they saw Jesus there with them, they became afraid. Even though the presence of God resided in the boat right there with them, they still were prone to worry.

Certainly! I imagine all of us might do the same thing.

We all have storms in our lives and experience evil around us. Soren certainly did. And we probably know in our head that God is with us through these seasons. But like Jesus' friends, we may think God is sleeping on a comfortable cushion, unaware of the pain and fear we experience. And because God is sleeping, we are left alone and vulnerable.

We feel stuck in the situation, thinking it will overtake us, get the better of us, leave us devastated.

Even though God is with us, we don't always feel God's presence or understand what God's presence might mean for us.

During the dark days of World War II, Christians from around the globe grabbed hold of the hope of God's presence and the difference it could make. The World Council of Churches was formed in that season and the founders created a symbol for the organization.

Their symbol was a ship being tossed by the sea with a mast in the shape of a cross. They faced the evil of Nazi Germany every day but declared that having Jesus in their boat gave them hope and made all the difference in how they lived in the world.

I want to take a moment to look at the words Jesus spoke in this story. They have lost something in translation.

His words to the storm "Peace! Be still!" give the impression of a calm man speaking gently to the wind, but the original Greek words were actually quite shocking and commanding.

Other translations have it "Quiet now! Be calm!" or "Silence! Be still!" or "Quiet! Settle down!" In every translation I found there were exclamation points to note a firmness in Jesus' command to the storm.

Jesus here is a person who is taking charge in a dicey situation with authority.

Then, Jesus' words to his friends hold a more scolding tone than the version we often read. The Message translation has Jesus saying "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?"

He addressed his friends about their seeming loss of faith when they panicked in fear as they felt completely out of control in face of the storm.

Jesus implied that there was no need for them to be stressed by the evil around them. Even while Jesus was asleep and not taking direct action, God's power was still with them, even in them, and there was no need to worry.

My favorite line in this story is the last verse. It says "they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"

This is a picture of the sovereign God who has power even over the dark and treacherous sea. God had shown up to silence the beast of the sea.

But more than this, God was present all along among a people who were largely unaware that God was there at all.

It is not only true that God's realm is present among people on earth right now, but that God's presence has power in this world.

Jesus' friends knew he was special. But Jesus kept surprising them, filling them with wonder,

awe, and I imagine a bit of holy fear.

Initially, they are stuck on what Jesus had just done. He had defied nature, telling the storm to stop and remarkably it did! Who is this guy? That is one of the central questions of Mark's story.

Once they got over what Jesus had done, hopefully they were able to begin thinking about what Jesus was telling them about fear, and how they were being held in God's hand at all times, even when Jesus wasn't there to calm the storm.

Jesus was calling his disciples (and now calling us) to a deeper, more grounded faith as we enter a season of uncertainty and change.

It is certain that in the coming months and years this congregation will experience unrest, fear, and worry as we sail on this journey with Jesus toward a new age of this congregation.

Let me remind you that we need not fear. We can trust that we are in God's hands, even when things get dicey.