

June 23, 2024

St. Mark 4:35-41:

The Boat of Real Life

- I. He's with Us.
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St. Mark 4:35-41

Dear Friends in Christ,

“You can run but you can’t hide.” That’s what we might say to someone who’s trying to avoid something that cannot be avoided. And God says to those who think they can hide from Him:

“Am I a God at hand (that is, limited only to a specific place)...and not a God far away (above all things)? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him, declares the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord (Jer. 23:23-24).”

Nothing is hidden from God. But there’s another aspect to this, one recorded in the 57th chapter of Isaiah:

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in a high and holy place, and also with him who is of contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite (v.15).”

Life has so many ups and downs, doesn’t it? Some very blessed and wonderful. Some very difficult. Some devastating. It’s said, “Well, that’s life.” But it must be said, “That’s life in a fallen world.” And so, we’re here, once again to ride . . .

THE BOAT OF REAL LIFE

I. He’s with Us.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat. Just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing (vv.35-38)?”

“He was in the stern, asleep...” Jesus, God the Son in human flesh but without sin, sleeps. I’m guessing some ask, “Is God aware of my situation? Is He asleep?” The Psalmist writes, “He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel (the church) will neither slumber nor sleep (Ps. 121:3,4).” He is everywhere and aware of everything at the same time.

However, isn’t this the question when the circumstances of life become a fierce storm: “Do you not care that we are perishing?” And are not the following questions ones we ask when the cares and fears of life appear to be an incredible wall? “Lord, do you not care? Are you listening? Are you there?”

And God said, “I dwell...with him who is of contrite and lowly spirit (Is.57:15).” The contrite and lowly are those hurting from sin and guilt - us. The storms of sins’ consequences can be overwhelming. The broken and contrite heart always looks to Jesus for comfort and help. And He’s always there. It’s the promise from His Word: “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Is.43:25).”

Every time you and I walk into this Sanctuary we are greeted by a Crucifix standing on an Altar. They are vivid reminders of the love of God, though much of the church doesn’t want such reminders because visitors might find them repulsive, especially the crucifix, and might turn most away. Besides, a blood soaked cross is fit only for the worst criminals; in this case Jesus who would bear the sin crimes of every human. As the Apostle John wrote, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (the gift to win God’s favor) (I Jn.4:10).” I want the Crucifix and Altar, don’t you?

But there might be a question looming in the back of some minds. A question that has been asked by God's people: "Why such difficult and frightening moments in life?"

II. No Matter How We See Things.

F.B. Meyer was a British pastor of the late 19th to early 20th centuries. He wrote, "Earthly prosperity is no sign of the special love of heaven; nor are sorrow and care (i.e, worry) any mark of God's disfavor, but the reverse. God's love is robust and eager - not for our own comfort, but for our lasting blessedness." What Meyer wrote strikes a powerful blow against much of the preaching of the day that the love of God is the promise of earthly prosperity and contentment. The truth is, there are countless wicked people in this world who are very prosperous and very content without the love of God in their lives! They will die in their wickedness and spend eternity in incomprehensible agony! Prosperity and worldly contentment are not always proofs of God's blessings.

God doesn't take away all the stormy "boat" rides we experience in this life. He sees us through and uses them to pull us to Himself. It's always what the Word promises: "(God) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...(I Pt. 1:3,4)."

You see? No matter how we see life, through faith in Christ, all our sins that separate us from the eternal love of God have been forgiven. We belong to Him.

III. The On-Going Struggle.

But, again, there is still a problem. It's within us. It's the on-going struggle with the sin in us. It's water that can fill the boat. It's the familiar words of Paul: "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me (Rm. 7:15-17)." The struggle goes on.

A fellow by the name of J. Clyde Henry wrote:

"Our confessions of faith are so easily spoken and often so very shallow. (There's) the old story of the young man who was writing a love letter to his sweetheart, boasting of his great love. He wrote, 'To show my love for you I would cross a trackless desert, I would brave the burning forest, I would traverse the mighty oceans, I would face the Arctic cold,' and so on and on. Then, at the end, he added, 'P.S. I will be over tomorrow night if it doesn't rain.' (Henry then stated) We laugh at such a story. Yet how many times we speak to Christ in just that way."

"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord." (Of course, that is, if it's a step upward.)

"Over mountain or plain or sea." (But I would expect to have first- class accommodations.)

"I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord." (But, please to an audience that will appreciate my presence.)

The Lord help us to remember His Word through Peter, "(you) by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pt. 1:5)." The "last time" could be His return at any time, or the moment we are individually called out of this world. And we, most definitely, must take these words of Peter with us:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary (and it typically is necessary), you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (the revelation referring either to His return, or what we receive at the moment of death) (I Pt. 1:6,7).

There are two powerful words there: *trials, tested*. We will ride the boat in very severe storms at times. The water will pour in. We will either swim away from or turn to God and cry out to Him. And over and over again, the Word stands before us: "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Heb.12:1)." "Run with endurance the race," which can be understood as "agony." We cry out, and the Lord always hears and forgives the repentant, believing heart. He responds:

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"
And the wind ceased, and there was great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith (vv.39,40)?"

Most don't want to hear it, but life isn't about what we're going to get out of this world. It's about this:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (I Pt. 1:8,9).

He's in our boat of life.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott