

I. Beginning

Please echo this prayer with me.

Oh God who made the heart and ear,

We listen care'fly as you draw near,

To hear your word in many ways

And live your life through all of our days. Amen.

Hear a word from God from Mark 4:35-41

35On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." 36So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. 37Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. 38Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?"

39 Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" and he said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind died down, and there was a great calm. 40 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

41 But they were terribly afraid and said to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

This is a word from God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

The title of my sermon this morning in our 'Questions Jesus Asked' series is, "Why are you afraid?"

When we ask questions, the tone in which we ask them is important!

If you're like me, you don't like it when people take an accusatory, prosecutorial tone when they ask you a question.

I hope hear that kind of tone in my question.

I'm not coming to you with that kind of tone.

As I've studied our text this week, I've decided that Jesus didn't take that kind of tone with his disciples.

And in my own humble attempt to follow Jesus, I've decided that he doesn't take that kind of tone with us either.

I know that many people are afraid, and I think I understand why.

In our text, the disciples are afraid for good reason.

They're in a boat at night in the middle of a storm.

Waves are crashing over the sides of the boat.

That's why they were afraid.

That's a good reason to be afraid!

Perhaps you're an immigrant living in the United States and are experiencing the cruelty and chaos of the anti-immigrant Trump Administration.

Or a person in the middle of domestic violence and someone is hurting you.

Or a person who has no place to lay your head tonight but the hard concrete of the sidewalk beside the street.

Those are good reasons to be afraid.

So in this moment I want us to name our fear.

I love to do origami.

So I'd like for you to use your holy imagination, take your fear, and fold it into the most famous origami of all, the origami crane.

And then I want you to give those fears turned in to origami cranes to me.

As one of your pastors, I will hold those cranes in my hands, I will hold those fears in my heart.

And I will give those fears to God, who has very big ears and a very big heart and very good hands, and who hears and holds us and our fears, and stays with us, beside us, through them all.

II. Jesus calls us to "go across to the other side"

In each one of the first eight chapters of the Gospel of Mark, there is a reference to Jesus walking beside, crossing, or approaching the Sea of Galilee.

I love this because I love the sea.

How about you?

When I was a boy, my grandpa sold tomatoes from his garden along Hudson Road and used the money he made to rent a house at Ocean Isle Beach along the coast of North Carolina for our family.

In the beginning, there were twenty-one of us staying in the house together. Over the years, that number grew to almost forty of us staying together by the sea for one week each year!

My grandpa always rented a house with a deck and a staircase that led right out to the sand dunes and the beach and the ocean.

I'd sit out on the deck in a rocking chair each morning at sunrise and each evening at sunset with my tattered notebook in my lap and my trusty pen in my hand and write stories as I'd feel the ocean breeze on my face, hear the breaking waves in my ears, and know the peace of Christ in my heart.

What a safe and comfortable place!

For forty years, The Other Side magazine stood on the comfortable shore of American Christianity and called to us, like Jesus calling to us, "Let us go across to the other side."

It rolled off a secondhand press in the basement of Fred and Anne Alexander in the tiny town of Savannah, Ohio in 1965. They were a retired fundamentalist white missionary couple who believed that if white Christians were told the truth about racism, they would repent and change their ways. That they would go over to "the other side" from the evil of segregation to the goodness of integration.

Instead, fundamentalist white Baptist Christians ignored them.

They refused to go to the other side.

But a new generation of radical young evangelicals didn't ignore them. They learned of the magazine through John, the Alexanders' son, then at Wheaton College. A few years later, a group of impassioned young seminary students in Chicago would crank out their first issue of the Post-American, a modest publication that would become Sojourners Magazine.

The Other Side magazine taught us that faith was never meant to remain safe and comfortable, folded neatly inside a church bulletin. Faith had feet. Faith crossed racial borders, prison walls, national borders, economic divisions, and **all the frightened little lines we draw between ourselves and our neighbors.**

The Other Side helped us hear voices that rarely appeared in glossy magazines or evening news reports—the voices of the poor, the imprisoned, women, Native Americans, peacemakers, and people wounded by racism, violence, nationalism, and exclusion. It reminded us that personal conversion and social justice belong together, because Jesus heals both human hearts and the broken structures those hearts create.

The magazine did not merely write about another world. It tried to live one—through shared salaries, fair trade, environmental care, community, creativity, mercy, and costly discipleship.

It pushed our buttons because sometimes the Spirit has to disturb us before the Spirit can change us.

The Other Side gave us courage to leave the safe and comfortable shore and travel toward the hard places where Jesus was already waiting—among the forgotten, the wounded, and the brave little mustard seeds of God's upside-down kingdom.

What is “the other side” for you? It might be a recovery program. It might be a cup of coffee and a conversation with a political enemy about how to fight wholeheartedly for your ideas without losing your whole heart. It might be asking, “Will you forgive me?” or saying, “I forgive you.” It will be a risky place (I can almost guarantee it will be). It will be a place where Jesus’ touch is needed most.

Jesus is calling us to go across to the other side.

Are you ready to go?

Let’s go!

III. Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid?”

“...following Jesus may well take us straight into encounters with the worst pain and suffering of the world, the places where Jesus’ powerful touch is most needed.” (Meda Stamper, Working Preacher, 2012)

Life stands toe-to-toe with chaos and cruelty at many of the borders in Mark. There are dividing lines that allow us to keep what’s safe and comfortable on one side, and to banish whatever makes us afraid to the other side of the sea.

Jesus declares that he intends to erase those dividing lines.

In liminal places (places that cause us to change or to risk everything), Jesus ministers, opens hearts to new possibilities, and sets people free to enter into a new future in freedom and wholeness. I think that's what our hearts are really seeking – not safety and comfort but freedom and wholeness.

Jesus meddles with borders, not because he has a penchant for chaos, but because the upside-down kingdom of God extends God's love to places that we might have thought were beyond its limits. To Jesus, no place is desolate. No person is abandoned.

So Jesus banishes harmful spirits, welcomes outsiders, gives the best seats at the table to the poor, restores community, exposes the lies that prop up counterfeit standards of greatness, and defeats death. Nothing will inhibit his desire to do ministry on "the other side."

In the end, it does not matter what it is that threatens to keep him from crossing the lake. What's more important is that he will not be deterred. (Matt Skinner, Working Preacher, 2018)

Nor shall we.

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IV. Jesus asks, "Have you still no faith?"

Maybe this was not an ACCUSATION but an INVITATION.

Maybe it is an INVITATION to reflect on what it means to be on the other side of a situation that we thought would kill us.

Maybe we get to ask questions like, "Where was my faith? What did I fear?"

Faith is a way to find meaning in life where storms are inevitable.

My goal is to trust God in the moment and not just in retrospect.

(Nadia Bolz-Weber, Stormy with a Chance of Grace: Have a Little Faith)

How can we trust God in the moment?

The Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, are teaching me a way to pray that helps me trust God in each moment.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, taught a way to pray that he called **The Composition, by Imagining the Place**.

I invite you to enter into the scene by "composing the place" by imagining yourself in our story with as much detail as you can muster.

What do you see? I see Jesus in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on the pillow. And as I see him, I feel a deep empathy in my heart for him. In our text, when the disciples see him, they say, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" But I don't say that. Instead, I say, "Teacher, I care that

you've poured out so much of your heart that you're exhausted. I care that you're so tired, you can't keep your eyes open. I care."

The disciples in our text want (need) to find the fully divine Jesus, the Jesus who created heaven and earth, the Jesus who created the land and the sea, the Jesus who created a sky that can be stormy or calm, the Jesus who can say, "Be quiet!" to the wind and bring silence, who can say, "Be still!" to the waves and bring calm.

But I want (need) to find the fully human Jesus, the Jesus who knows what it means to be you and me. He gets us, as these cool new commercials from the He Gets Us project so poignantly and profoundly show. (You can go to their website, hegetsus.com, to see the latest commercial, "I'm Losing").

The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis, delivered a sermon titled "Do You Not Care that We Are Perishing?" I think you'd like her. When she was first elected bishop, she visited each of the forty-eight parishes in her diocese. She wanted to listen to each parish, each person, with the ears of her heart, and shepherd them, as good bishops do, to help them go where God wants them to go.

In her sermon, she said, "Jesus was God's act of radical empathy, and we are called to do likewise." As I see Jesus sleeping on the boat, I want to be God's act of radical empathy for him. I want to be an act of radical empathy for you. And I want us to be an act of radical empathy for the world around us.

I trust this Jesus who is fully human.

He teaches me to trust God in the moment.

(James Martin, SJ, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*)

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Are you ready to go?

Let's go!

V. Conclusion

It was sunrise.

Juniper sat barefooted on the brick wall between Stone Avenue and the mercy center.

Beside him, Miss Tina sat in her sunflower-yellow dress and old combat boots, her buggy with everything she owned in the whole, wide world beside her.

Between their feet, a dandelion grew through a crack in the sidewalk, gritty and golden, humble and heroic.

They watched the morning traffic roll past them.

"Jesus said, 'Let us go across to the other side,'" whispered Juniper.

Miss Tina nodded. "That sounds simple when you read it in church," she said.

"It surely does," he said.

"But the other side is where the people you don't understand live," she said.

"And the people you were taught to fear. And the truths you've been avoiding."

Juniper looked down at the dandelion.

"I think I prefer this side," he said. "I know where the coffee is. I know which bricks wobble. I know who will wave when they pass."

Miss Tina smiled. "Comfort will make a little kingdom out of these bricks."

Juniper laughed softly. "That sounds like something Jesus would say."

"The other side might change you," Miss Tina said.

"That's what scares me," he said.

"Not the storm?" she asked.

"The storm too," he answered. "But mostly the changing."

A city bus sighed at the corner.

Somewhere above them, a Carolina wren began singing a song for the new day.

Juniper folded his hands.

"The disciples climbed into the boat with Jesus. Then the wind rose, and following him felt like the worst decision they had ever made," he said.

Miss Tina studied the brightening sky.

"And Jesus was asleep," she said. But he was still in the boat."

Juniper turned toward her.

"That matters, doesn't it?" he asked.

"It matters most," she answered.

The dandelion trembled in the breeze but did not break.

"What do you think is on the other side for us?" Juniper asked.

Miss Tina looked toward the Mercy Center doors.

"Maybe somebody whose politics make you mad. Maybe somebody sleeping under a bridge. Maybe a migrant family afraid to answer the door. Maybe an old woman pushing everything she owns in a grocery cart."

Juniper smiled.

"That last one sounds familiar," he said.

Miss Tina nudged his bare foot with her boot.

"The other side is anywhere love asks you to leave what you know behind," she said.

Juniper watched the sunlight spill across the sidewalk.

"And when the waves get high?" he asked.

"We remember who is in the boat," she answered.

"And when our hearts start shouting?" he asked.

"We listen for the voice that says, 'Peace. Be still,'" she answered.

Juniper looked at the little dandelion.

Then he looked toward the road.

"All right," he whispered. "Let's cross over."

Jesus is calling us to go across to the other side.

Are you ready to go?

Let's go!

Let's go with each other with Jesus.

Amen.

VI. Benediction

No matter who you are or what you've done
who you love or what you've lost
where you've gone or where you've stayed
there will always be a seat for you at Triune Mercy
because you are a beloved child of God