

June 28, 2015

Mark 4: 35-41

We know stress is one of the greatest threats to our personal and spiritual well-being. It is both destructive and addictive in nature. Physicians report that more than 75% of patient visits are related to the negative impact of stress on a person's overall health. As we've come to know, prolonged stress breaks down the immune system, taxes the cardiovascular system, disturbs the digestive system and threatens our emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Yet in many circles, the more stressful you describe your life, the more committed your coworkers or friends assume you are to work or family. Peace of mind and equanimity are often viewed as signs of lack of commitment and ambition.

However, we also know, there is good stress and not just bad stress. Beginning an exercise regime, going back to school, exploring new gifts and talents, falling in love or facing our fears are all good and necessary stresses.

So we might say there is stress and distress.

In our gospel lesson, the disciples are distressed, panicking until they realize that **Jesus** is with them in the boat.

I think, two amazing things happen in the story.

First **Jesus** calms the disciples' inner storm.

In the midst of the terror, the disciples suddenly realize that things will work out as long as they focus on **Jesus**: As long as **Jesus** is involved in their situation. So, they calm down enough, as they recognize his presence, to seek his help. **Jesus'** calm approach keeps them calm as he rises and addresses the storm.

The second amazing thing is that **Jesus** calms the outer storm as well, and the wind and waves relent. So **Jesus** first calms the disciples' inner life and in that peaceful moment, the external world also becomes transformed and manageable.

It all boils down to this: **Calm the inner life, calm the outer life.**

Now here is another wisdom tradition dealing with another form of storm in our life. A Sufi master comes upon some disciples who are eavesdropping on two people shouting and yelling at each other.

He asks them why the people are behaving in this manner.

"They are shouting because they are angry at each other of course." The disciples say.

The master asks, "But then why shout?"

The disciplines ponder, but have no answers. They ask the master to explain further.

The Sufi master replies; “When people are at great distances they need to shout so they can be heard. When two people are close to each other, they need not shout; but if their hearts are far apart, they shout.” He goes on to say, “When two people are in love, they don’t need to speak much at all. When two people know each other intimately, and their hearts are close, just a look and they’ll know everything about the heart of the other. But when people are angry at each other, they feel the need to shout.”

So here’s the insight for this kind of storminess in our relationships.

**Notice your volume when your heart is far from another’s.**

### *Application for Today*

**In the storms of life.** Calm the inner life, calm the outer life.

**In the storms of relationships.** Notice your volume when your heart is far from another’s.

### Mark 6: 45-52

Isn’t it interesting that the disciples are in yet another threatening storm. And **Jesus** is there to quiet and settle things down, yet again. I think there is a message in the repetition.

Thomas Merton reminds us that there is a pervasive form of contemporary chaos. Today we would call it ‘the perfect storm’. It strikes the caring and committed and compassionated folk and results in over involvement and over functioning. The rush and pressure of modern life coupled with the **Christian** concern to love our neighbour can create the storm tossed mindset. To allow oneself to be tossed and turned or swept up by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to the chaos of a storm tossed life.

Are you hearing me? Can any of you related to this? Right!

Now I am finding that for those of us in later life, with at least 60 years under our belt, it also takes the form of worrying and fretting about where the world is heading. It is the angst over the changing values and lifestyles of our children and children’s children.

It is the over functioning to hold on to the tried and true. It’s the hand wringing over the perceived inadequacies of the generations that follow us.

Do you know what I mean?

Whether we are wracked with worry or fraught with over-functioning, we end up neutralizing our work for compassion. Our distress destroys our own inner capacity for sharing and caring. It also destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom, which seeks balance in order to connect to **God**.

This is why we need the change of pace of summer. We need summer's help to recognize **Jesus** coming to us on the water to calm the storms of life.

***Application for the Summer***

Take some time off. Stop working or worrying so much.

At least for a little while, just let go and let **God**.

Amen.