

In the Boat Together, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 03090621
2 Corinthians 6:1-13 and Mark 4:35-41
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We hear the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat. This is a story so important, that it appears in all four of the gospels. Imagine what it was like! It had been a long day. Jesus had been teaching and healing. Huge crowds had gathered around him, so much so, that he and some disciples had gotten into one of their boats and put out a little ways so more people could hear him. This was probably the occasion of Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount"¹ and Luke's "Sermon on the Plain."²

It was late and the sun was setting, and they started for the eastern shore of the lake. There were no navigation lights on the boat. It was getting dark, and a storm came up. The wind blew. The water became choppy. Whitecaps began breaking on the waves. Soon, the wind was blowing so hard that the waves came crashing over the gunwales, the sides of the boat. Can you feel your soaked clothes as the water drenches you? It was one of those storms where they had to yell at each other to be heard.

Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. It had been that hard of a day! The panicked disciples yelled, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"³

We might know what such a storm is like. We might feel as though we are in the midst of one right now. There are the dark clouds of an economic crisis around us. The waves of uncertainty are knocking teachers out of their jobs. The winds have blown back the economic funding of local charities. The thunder of ugly words tear relationships and families apart. Any minute, we might see the lightening nuclear flashes of Iran or Pakistan or North Korea. There is no doubt we're in the midst of a storm. "Jesus, do you not care that we are perishing?"

What kind man can this be who sleeps through a storm? He woke up and he said, "Peace! Be still." And suddenly, "the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."⁴ Jesus was a man of faith. He had a deep trust that God is, at all times, both good and near at hand. He had the kind of faith that allows one to be calm when the storms are at their worst. May we have that same kind of faith that allows us to be calm when the storms of war rage and the waves of economic uncertainty crash.

We might call this one of Jesus' miracles. After all, he did calm the storm. But, if we concentrate on the miracle, we miss the point. We miss the point just like the crowds around Jesus did. They came to be miraculously healed— to have their sight restored, their limbs healed, and their mental illnesses cured. They crowded around Jesus to be fed.

Likewise, we come to Jesus to work miracles in our lives. We want him to calm our storms. Or, if he won't do that, we want Jesus to at least bail the boat. If all we want Jesus for is to calm the storms around us, then we have missed the point.

"Peace! Be still." The disciples, the text says, "were filled with great awe"⁵ when they saw him quiet the storm. Literally, the words in Greek were, "They feared a great fear!" As much as they feared the storm, they feared Jesus even more now! "Who then is this, that even the wind

¹Matthew 5-7

²Luke 6

³Mark 4:38

⁴Mark 4:39

⁵Mark 4:41

and the sea obey him?”⁶

Jesus had just spent the day teaching. He told his listeners that the measure they give would be the measure they get back. He told them to do to others what they would like others to do to them. “You are the salt of the earth.”⁷ “You are the light of the world.”⁸ “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”⁹

When we hear those words, and when we understand what Jesus requires of us, we can be filled with a great fear also. I don’t know if I can love my enemies. I don’t know if I can control my anger. And, there are times when I don’t want to be salt or light for others. Yet, when we can turn the other cheek and do to others what we would like them to do to us, it is miraculous. These are the miracles: that we can be salt and light and that we can love our enemies.

Jesus was not a mighty military or political leader. He was not a star, and he did not look for fame. He was a simple carpenter speaking from a boat. What Jesus is all about is humility, self-sacrifice, and a life of quiet service to the glory of God.

You know what all of his teaching did for him. It got him into trouble with the powers that be. It got him crucified. Jesus has come to die, and all his teachings point forward to the cross. If all you expect from Jesus are miracles, and you remove the cross from your line of vision, then Jesus becomes only a cosmic boat bailer, a Mr. Fixit kind of figure whose only purpose is to help you realize your heart's desires. Jesus wants more than that from us, and that better fill us with fear.

Those disciples were in a boat together with Jesus. That presents for us an image that is very real. If this is the nave of the church building, we are sitting in this boat together. While the storms rage outside, we have each other and we have Jesus in the boat with us. Here, in this boat, we practice humility and service. In this boat, we strengthen each other and build each other up. We row together towards the safety of the harbor. We encourage each other to use the oars, the gifts that we have been given so that all can reach the harbor safely. Jesus has shown us how.

I’d like you to recall another image. It is the photo from space of a magnificent blue planet. We are on that blue planet together. The folks who make up this spaceship earth are many and varied. They have different needs and different ways of life. Too often, some of us want to throw others off the boat. We prefer to be with people like ourselves. We tend to exclude those who look, act, or pray differently. We will suffer the storms of wars and economic uncertainty until the day we realize we’re all related to each other.

Those relationships transcend political boundaries. They are not restricted by nations or ayatollahs or preachers or generals.

Where were Jesus and the disciples going that evening? They were not headed home to a comfortable bed. They were headed across the lake to a foreign land. They were going to the land of the Gerasenes. Jesus’ love knew no boundaries.

On this Father’s Day, we would do well to remember that we are children of the same parent. And, on this Father’s Day, we would do well to remember that the sacred duties of fathers are to be responsible for the lives they help bring into this world, to teach gentleness, compassion and care, and to teach non-violence: to be able to say as Jesus did, “Peace! Be still.”

⁶Mark 4:41

⁷Matthew 5:13

⁸Matthew 5:14

⁹Matthew 5:44