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"Peace in Life's Storms (John Waite and Mark 4)" The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (06/23/2024, The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let us pray.

Almighty God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable

and direct sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

Amen.

In 1984 the Englishman John Waite recorded a song called I Ain't Missing You that was number one on the charts.

You may not have been paying attention in 1984 to what was going number one gold on the charts,

but I ain't missing you was a song that was difficult to miss.

Not only from when John Waite recorded it and by the way John Waite also formed a supergroup

called Bad English with the members of Journey.

So maybe you heard his voice there, but I ain't missing you was then re-recorded by Tina

Turner.

It was then recorded by Brooks and Dunn for those of you who like a more country sound

proving again that there are no country songs, only country singers.

And then Allison Krauss recorded it most recently.

So it's had a long history and I think it's because it gets to something that many people

can relate to which is denial.

So he is in a breakup and he's calling the person that he's had this breakup with and

he's saying I ain't missing you, but clearly he is.

I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where you are in denial and you kind of know

you're in denial but you still hold onto the denial.

That's what the song's about and I bring it up because in one line of the lyric he captures

something that I think everybody can relate to.

The line I'm going to read it to you, it's a little dated because of a technological

reference to those ancient times, the late 20th century, but the emotional resonance

of it is still very much contemporary and with us.

The line is there is a storm raging down this long distance line tonight.

Long distance was this thing when you had a phone in your house and

through copper wires,
you metal sound magically traveled and there were people like the
Wichita lineman that
made sure that this went from house to house.
So long distance you had to pay extra if you wanted those electrons to
travel farther
on those metal wires to a house that was very far away, that was long
distance.
But the key point here is there is a storm raging.
Now there was no storm.
It was just a break up, a fractured relationship.
So he's talking about a storm that's inside and I know very few people
that don't have
that going on in their life.
Now we see Jesus in a literal storm in our reading from Mark 4 with
his disciples in
this boat.
However, there was also an internal invisible one in the hearts of the
disciples.
So whether you have an actual external storm or one inside or both
going on, this is something
that I find to be almost a universal human experience.
I was listening to the surgeon general of the United States give a
talk about why he
wants warning labels for young people on social media.
And he said, he did quote studies and data and what the science is
telling us and what
mental health professionals are telling us.
He said the reason this is so important to him was because as a child
he was shy, lonely,
socially awkward and he knows from personal experience how difficult
that time of life
can be and he didn't want to add more difficulty to children today.
And that's not what I expected from the surgeon general of the United
States.
Here's a person at the top of his profession but talking about real
pain that he had in
his youth that still affects him to this day.
Another surprising storm I heard about recently was a Stanford
psychiatrist best-selling
author, professor at one of the top universities in the country paid
lots of money to speak
to Fortune 500 companies about neurotransmitters.
And she said the reason she realized the death of the human problem is
what really made
it come home to her.
She knew about it obviously sort of theoretically but really what
brought it home to her was
that she became addicted to romance novels.
And here she is, this elite scholar who has a commanding vocabulary

and his red works
of great literature, then somebody gave her twilight, which she read
and thought, oh,
this is great, read the whole series and then wanted more, which led
to romance novels
and it was like Axel Rose said, and Mr. Brownstone used to do a little
and then a little
one do it, so a little got more and more.
So she went to reading these books, not by her bedside on the
nightstand or maybe on
a road trip.
She began carrying them in her purse all the time, any spare moment
she had to read these
books to the extent where she would between seeing clients in her
psychiatry practice, instead
of taking the notes or whatever she was supposed to be doing, would
whip out the bodice
repair and get back to the story.
And she just realized, I know I shouldn't be doing this but I am
still, this is not the
best use of my time.
He's not maybe wrong but this is taking over and she had this storm
going on in her life.
Whether it's Claire Daines playing the CIA agent in Homeland who even
though she is successful
in the top of her profession can't really come clean about her
substance use and mental
health problems, whether it was JFK who for all of his adult life due
to injuries sustained
in World War II, both from malaria and his physical injuries, spent
his whole life essentially
wearing a modified corset so he could stand because his back was so
destroyed.
These people who looked great on the outside but on the inside there's
a storm raging,
none other than Justin Timberlake, who revealed his humanity quite
clearly this past weekend
and now the tour is ruined.
But we all have these storms going on in our lives.
We all face these storms and so the thing about this passage in Mark
IV, I'm supposed to
tell you Jesus calm the storms and so he will calm your storm.
He has power over that so just have faith.
And Jesus did calm the storm and he can calm the storm.
But what's more interesting to me and I think more relevant to most
human beings I know
is what happens before that because it seems to me that much of life
is lived with the disciples
in the boat before the storm is calmed.
That seems to be the existence for many, many people.

And I think there's some real help in this text.
So I'm going to walk through it and then I'm going to say what I think that help is.
So you heard the story, he's on the boat with the disciples on the Sea of Galilee which
is this little Sea of Galilee is essentially water at the bottom of a large bowl in northern
Israel.
These mountains, hills around it and the sea is there so the windstorms can get whipped
up in there and that's what happens.
There's no rain or thunder as far as we know.
It's just this enormous windstorm that is causing these huge waves to crash over the side
of these boats.
It was probably about 20, 30 feet long this boat.
They found examples of these fishing boats from the first century and they are relatively
shallow vessels and it would have been easy for big waves to get into it.
Even though there's at least 13 people in the boat that we know of, one is the sleep,
no help whatsoever.
The other 12 are bailing out as fast as they can but the waves are so big that it says
the boat is getting swamped.
And so again, Jesus, not helpful.
A sleep in the stern, that means the back seat.
He's got a little cushion.
Apparently Jesus has go with wet pillows, not a problem for him, I'm not my favorite.
I'm sort of the I-mask earplugs, white noise, you know, like at the blackout curtain.
Jesus did have the white noise from the wind and the waves, I guess, but other than that,
he just goes to sleep on this soaking bed on this damp cushion and this is weird, right?
I mean, could you sleep in such a situation?
Would you sleep?
I mean, he's supposed to be the saver in the world.
And the least he could do is wake up for a second and be like waves and go back to sleep.
But no, he's just asleep, the whole thing.
And so the disciples wake him up and pray one of those great honest prayers of the Bible.
We pray fancy prayers, you know.
Father God, we just want to ask for the Episcopal version.
Oh, Almighty God, we've received the whichever one, sort of fancy prayers or whatever.
They are much rarer.

Don't you care?
We're dying.
That's a good prayer.
It's honest.
So Jesus wakes up and he says, the wind and the waves, can you all keep it down?
And the wind and the waves are stilled.
And the disciples say, oh my gosh, who is this man?
We've seen it in New Miracles, but we didn't know he had power over nature, the creation,
end of story.
And here's the question, not can Jesus calm the storm, which he can. The question to me that seems to be more relevant is how did he have so much peace in the middle of the storm, so much so that he didn't feel like it was necessary to even calm it.
He was just going to sleep through, just ride it out.
I mean, I sort of tend to follow the disciples plan for dealing with crises, the three step disciples of Jesus plan for dealing with crisis.
Step one, freak out, step two, get resentful, step three, yell at God. Those are my three steps to dealing with crisis.
Jesus, again, just goes to sleep.
This is crazy.
We're taught to prevent storms, avoid storms at all costs, when storms happen, do everything we can to mitigate the situation, but Jesus is cool with this and this is crazy.
And there's lots of crazy in the story of Christians throughout the centuries.
There's this crazy of Jesus, there's the crazy of David going against this Goliath.
He heard that story from, for Samuel, there's the crazy of St. Paul saying, I'm okay with having nothing because I still have everything.
There's the crazy of St. Alvin, whose day we celebrate today, who when he was threatened with martyrdom and sentenced to death for his unshakable faith, this recent convert to Jesus Christ, he would not recant so he was sentenced to die and on the way to the executioner's sword, they had to cross the river there, there in the town now known as St. Alvin's England.
And he prayed, the story goes, that the river would dry up so that he could cross it more quickly and face his martyrdom.
I would have prayed, let there be a raging flood, that we cannot cross the river and we'll have to reschedule for a later date.

This idea of kind of running into the storm, of being a peace in the storm, this is crazy.

And this is where I want some help.

I know I can pray that the storm will stop and I know the storm will stop at some point.

Life is finite and we will go on to our citizenship in heaven.

But what I want help with is when the storm doesn't stop, what do I do?

And Jesus shows me, an example of someone who in the middle of the storm seems to be able to just be at peace.

The end of the service every Sunday we say the peace of God which passes on understanding

keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge of the love of God.

But I don't know about you, I feel like a leaky bucket.

I may leave filled with peace but it tends to start draining pretty quickly.

But I would like to be like Jesus.

I would like to be able to have peace in the middle of a storm so much so that I could sleep and rest.

And there's no magic trick to this.

There's no sort of, I can't wave my wand and make this happen for you or for me.

And that's why I take such comfort in the story because Jesus does his work with disciples

who like me are not super faithful, they're not super pious, they're yelling at God, they're

full of resentment, their faith is low and yet Jesus can still work.

So I think what this passage says to us is that while God may stop the bad thing and

God may even prevent the bad thing, there are times when the bad thing comes.

And it seems to me that those are the places where we tend to get most honest with ourselves

and most honest with God.

And there are the places where we tend to see God's power most clearly.

And what Jesus does here is he shows us an example of a person who in the midst of a storm

is so sure of God's love and grace that he doesn't follow the disciples three step plan

of freaking out and resentment and anger, but just rests.

Again, it's crazy, no one should go to sleep in the middle of a storm.

But if you know that God loves you and is real, like really know it, that actually changes

your whole perspective on everything.

I have a friend who's a theologian in Cambridge and he was asked recently, what is faith?

And he said, faith is acting like God is real and actually likes you.

Faith is acting like God is real and that he actually likes you.
Jesus to me is someone who shows faith in this story.
He has this peace because he knows that God is actually real and likes him.
So much so that he said, this is my son and the beloved with whom I'm well pleased.
This is how Jesus begins his ministry.
And Jesus, you know, Jesus is different than us when Homer Simpson is reading the Bible
in season seven of the Simpsons.
He gets to the end, closes the book, says, boy, this book is full of messed up people except
for this one guy.
This one guy is there to show us what does a life look like when someone is completely
aware of their belovedness by God.
What do you do if you know that you're completely beloved?
And this is what Jesus does.
He can rest in a storm.
And like I said, I wish I could tell you, just believe that, just rest in that.
Just know that.
And I do.
And I tell myself those things.
And you may have days where you're able to do that.
You may have days where you're not able to do that.
The good news of the story is that for the disciples who were not able to do that, Jesus
is still present and Jesus is still powerful and Jesus is still able to be asleep and at
peace in the middle of the storm and to calm the storm and to do all those things regardless
of the level of faithfulness of the people in the boat.
He can do all things.
And he's with you in those situations.
And I know that he will be with us in those situations because in the face of human suffering,
sinfulness, paralysis, anxiety, isolation, and greed, exploitation and all those things,
in light of the human problem, Jesus goes to the cross and enters that most raging of
all storms and tells us to come back week after week and take some bread and drink some
wine and to know that this is him and he's given himself for you.
He's entered the storm for you and so he's with you in your storm right now.
And by God's grace, by God's grace, by holding on to that, we find that God is actually
holding on to us.
Let us pray.

Almighty God, in the storms of our lives, which you know, we ask for
help in Christ's name
we pray.
Amen.