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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)  
June 20, 2021

Lectionary Year B: Mark 4:35-41

For an inland lake, Lake of the Woods, which straddles Minnesota and Ontario, can become quite rough. There are many square miles of open water and the lake itself isn't that deep, so any amount of wind will rile it up quickly. Many of the times I was out with my Dad, five- to six-foot rollers weren't uncommon. I never was on the lake during a storm, though. My Dad, on the other hand, did have such an experience, as well as some others on board to share it with him.

On this Father's Day, and just before I return to North Dakota to bury my father, you might find it a bit strange for me to tell of one of my Dad's goofs, but before I get any further into the story, let me remind you that it was one that he surely learned from. You see, when he was caught out in that storm, his boat had neither a decent compass nor a marine band radio. All there was were a few maps and some landmarks and buoys that you couldn't see anyway. And my Dad had taken his fellow fishermen out far from their home base of Wheelers Point, Minnesota. So as for what could've happened to them, the lack of appropriate navigational and communication equipment was a potential threat to their survival.

They made it home safely, but shortly thereafter, my Dad bought a proper marine compass and marine band radio!

But wouldn't a Christian believe that faith can get you through

anything? So when you're being tossed about in violent waters, you should have everything you need in the simple faith that God will protect you, right? Not so fast. Allow me to say that faith can't make up for stupidity or lack of preparation. It isn't necessarily faithful to venture far out into Lake of the Woods without the right navigational and communication equipment! To do such a thing and simply say "God will take care of us" isn't a sign of faith. Actually, you're putting God to the test...almost as if you're trying to find out how far you can go before the wind, the water, and the elements take your life. God might not appreciate that!

So that makes the question of how we approach this morning's Gospel text all the more complicated. It would seem that we shouldn't have anything at all to worry about because even a little faith ought to get us through. Whether we venture off into rough seas or we drive through torrential rains or get caught in a blizzard, Jesus will be there to protect us from harm, right? Putting things gently, I'd consider that to be rather naive. God gave you a brain, too, and to not exercise sound judgment is to not use your brain. Let's not see our faith as an excuse for stupidity, because the lesson of this morning's Gospel text concerns how Jesus can protect the faithful, not how we can go out unprepared and expect him to protect us. There's a big difference between the two.

Furthermore, Jesus is making a point about faith, not about venturing stupidly into dangerous waters. When the windstorm broke

out, he was, as far as we can tell from the text, unaware of what was going on, and about to sleep through the whole thing. He certainly didn't see what the big fuss was about, and with equal aplomb he calmed the waters. The text says, "He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm" (Mark 4:39). The ease with which Jesus handles the situation goes to show us just how important it is to retain our composure. While we'll likely never calm rough waters with three simple words, we can follow Jesus' lead in levelheaded responses to crises. And that only furthers Jesus' point about faith; unfaithful people are anxious and excitable. Faithful people are not.

A bit simplistic, yes...but consistent with the overall lesson.

When the disciples thought that they were goners, they had figured that Jesus was being indifferent even to the point of blissfully sleeping through all the calamity. But, as we find out so often in the Gospels, it is Jesus who always seems to know what's going on whereas the disciples are often, well, clueless. If, as I said earlier, the lesson here is about faith, the disciples clearly flunked the lesson! Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40). Jesus' extraordinary abilities and faith in his heavenly Father overwhelm the disciples so much that they're just dumbfounded by what they're witnessing. So it's as if Jesus and the disciples are on two different levels -- Jesus can do and comprehend a lot of things that the disciples can't. Naturally, any time that happens, frustration and/or confusion results.

But I think we can be encouraged to be faithful through the ways in which Jesus responds appropriately to the challenges in front of him. When storms rage, he calms them. When people are foolish, he offers wisdom. When faced with his impending death, he prays. This is someone in whom we can truly place our faith and trust. And beyond that, we have his example, so that by that example, we too may respond appropriately to our challenges. Sure, calming rough seas with three words might be a little out of our league, but there are times in which our faith can provide assurance beyond comparison. Your faith may not save you from your stupidity, but it will save you from being consumed by the rough seas in your life. It wasn't necessarily the water that hastened the disciples' undoing; it was their anxiety and panic. Had they been as faithful as Jesus wanted them to be, they would've responded much more calmly.

And yet, there are times in which you have to move it! In addition, there are times in which you have to be prepared. You don't have a lack of faith when you go far into Lake of the Woods with good maps, a good compass, and a marine band radio. (I realize that if Dad were alive today, we would add GPS to the list, too!) But regardless of the sophistication or simplicity of your equipment, I would say that, in contrast to employing these things out of a lack of faith, you have an abundance of common sense. That's called using the brains that God gave you!

If there were any bit of fatherly wisdom I could relate to my story on this Father's Day, I would mention how much we can learn from not only our father's triumphs, but from their mistakes, as

well. I am thankful that my Dad made it back from the stormy waters of Lake of the Woods and got to enjoy another 35-plus years with us, but I'll also never forget the speed with which he installed that navigational and communication equipment on his boat afterwards! Jesus wasn't there to say to Lake of the Woods, "Peace! Be still!" Nor should've anyone expected him to have done so. Let's not allow a blind faith to overtake intelligence and wisdom. Rather, let's allow intelligence and wisdom create an informed faith. Wherever the storms rage and the waves rise, may there always be Jesus to help us respond appropriately -- and faithfully -- to the calamity.

Amen.