



Sunday, Mar. 15, 2020  
*Sermon Series: Hard Questions On the Way*

Jesus Calms the Storms of Life  
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

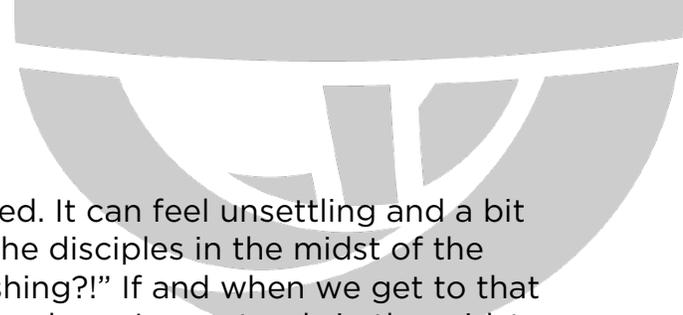
**Mark 4:35-41 NRSV**

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' 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. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Creator, and from Jesus Christ our Lord, who announces peace in the midst of storms, and in whom even the wind and the waves obey. Amen.

It feels a little like we've been beaten by wind and waves, and almost swamped this week, doesn't it? Everyday has brought the impact of COVID-19 a little closer. On Monday it was in MN, on Wednesday it was here in Rochester, by Thursday, it seemed the whole town was out of cleaning supplies and toilet paper, and by Friday our governor declared a state of emergency, encouraging us to limit our physical contact with others, and telling us to get ready for a new norm for the foreseeable future. As one of my friends said, "Yesterday was one heck of a year."

We are used to responding to blizzards and even the occasional flood or tornado. We know how to do that. We can see the progress as we dig out of a blizzard or of rebuilding after natural disaster. But this feels different. There's no visible disaster. No real signs that anything is amiss other than unending news coverage and an abundance of reminders to wash our hands (and DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE). And yet, this COVID-19 storm has stirred feelings of uncertainty that we are not used to dealing with. There's not a lot of new busyness to fill the void of



all the things that have been cancelled or delayed. It can feel unsettling and a bit isolating. Some of us may even feel a little like the disciples in the midst of the storm, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re perishing?!” If and when we get to that point, we need to remember the rest of this story, how Jesus stands in the midst of our storms and rebukes the chaos, calling out “Peace, be still.”

Peace, be still. It’s what we’re being urged to do right now. Be still. Wait. Stop for our own sake, but more importantly for the sake of our neighbors. “Peace, be still” is what it looks like to follow Jesus in a time like this. Don’t panic. Don’t hoard. Know that the God of peace, which passes all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in these stormy times. Trust that our Lord is not asleep in the stern, but very much aware of what is happening, and is in our midst.

Earlier this week, author Parker Palmer shared on his Facebook page this poem by Lynn Unger. It’s called Pandemic.

*What if you thought of [this time] as Jews consider Sabbath – the most sacred of times? Cease from travel. Cease from buying and selling. Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world different than it is. Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life. Center down.*

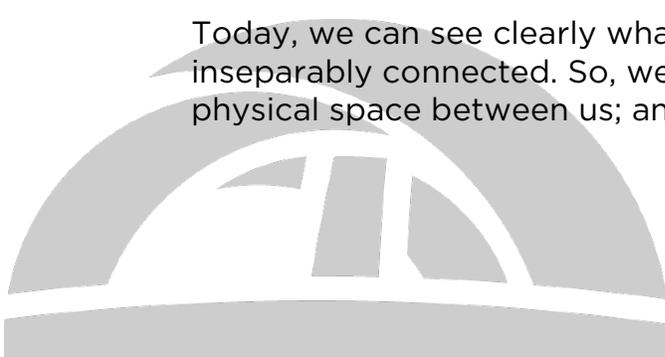
*And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart. Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful. (You could hardly deny it now.)*

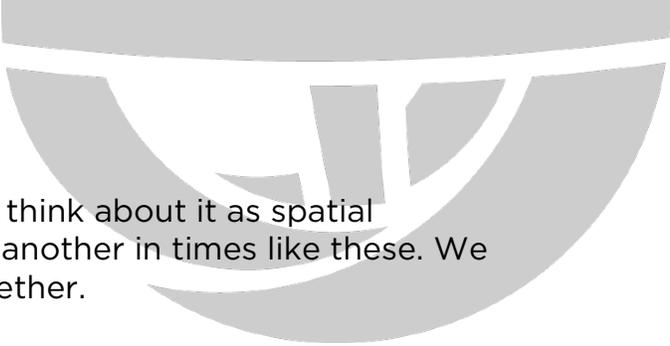
*Know that our lives are in one another’s hands. Surely, that has come clear. Do not reach out your hands. Reach out your heart. Reach out your words. Reach out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly, where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love – for better, or for worse, in sickness and in health, so long as we all shall live.*

Here’s the good news, friends. We’re in this together. God is calling us out of the storm as God has always done. The storm is primarily impacting our schedules, and daily routines at this point. It’s inconvenient, yes. And the inconvenience is vitally important for the sake of keeping this an inconvenience and not a disaster. But it’s not the end of the world. At this point, hundreds of people are not filling our hospitals and overwhelming our medical systems. And if we do this stillness now, and take all the precautions we can, we can join in God’s lifegiving work of calming this storm.

Today, we can see clearly what God has always known: that our lives are inseparably connected. So, we slow down. We stay put. We create some more physical space between us; and find different ways of being connected. Officials





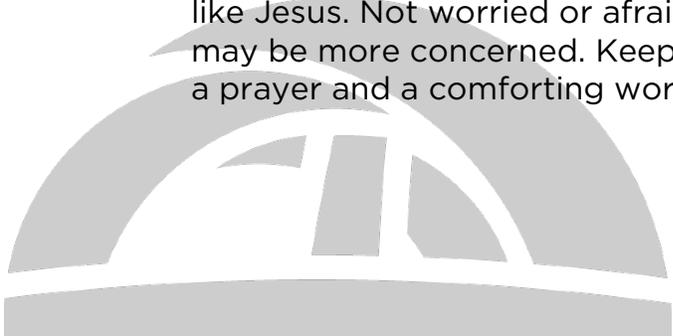
are calling for social distancing, but I'd like us to think about it as spatial distancing. We need social connection with one another in times like these. We can do this, and we can do it well if we do it together.

Earlier this week in a quarantined village in Italy, a man began to sing into a microphone out on his balcony. Soon, people were on their balconies, joining along. Some even brought accordions and tambourines. And within minutes songs of solidarity and joy bounced down the stone roads and ancient apartments bringing a little bit of hope in unchartered times.

As a church, we are taking precautions to create spatial distancing. You've likely seen the message from Pastor Vern, and the precautions we are taking going forward. As a quick recap, after today we will not worship in one place, but we will continue to offer worship experiences on Sundays and Wednesdays online. And we will continue to broadcast the 8:30 service on KOLM 1520AM. We're not going to have faith formation, confirmation, ZED Talks or adult classes in person, but we will be creating ways and encouraging you to continue the journey of faith together. We'll reduce the number of meetings, and those we do have will take place digitally by video conference. In the shifting and downsizing of life in these next few weeks, I also hope that we will all lean hard on the hope we have in Jesus and find ways in our daily lives to inspire solidarity and joy in the midst of unchartered times.

Perhaps this time can even be a hidden grace, a sacred time of Sabbath. We now have time to pray for those in Italy and China and Iran where people are perishing and where this feels much more like a disaster. We now have time to reach out our hearts to those who may experience isolation on an ongoing basis. Make a phone call to an aunt in assisted living. If you aren't in the high-risk population check on those who may be and offer to make a trip to the store for them. Donate to Channel One so that people impacted by work slowdowns and reduced hours may have what they need to make it through this time too. While you're at it, go to our website and donate to the work we are doing together here. Your sustained gifts will help us continue to provide pastoral care, to reach out with compassion to our community, and provide opportunities for people to deepen in faith, even as we remain spatially distant. God at work as much as ever in and through the church bringing hope to a suddenly weary and worried world.

I'm sure that's how the disciples felt as the storm clouds gathered over the lake that night...weary, worried, out of control. Storms do that to us. If that is how you are feeling, it's okay. But know that you are not alone and there are plenty of others who will walk with you in this storm. And if you're feeling a little sleepy, like Jesus. Not worried or afraid, that's good too. But keep awake to those who may be more concerned. Keep your hearts and hands open to lend a hand. Offer a prayer and a comforting word.





People of faith have a long tradition of leading the way during public health crises. We know from Mayo's storied history how Christians played a key role in establishing hospitals to make our society healthier. The Church in Africa has played a central role in fighting AIDS/HIV and Malaria. As God's people, we have an opportunity today to lead the way in this public health crisis, too.

You see, friends, we belong to a God who is gracious and merciful; a God who is with us when the storms roll in, a God who has called us to love and serve our neighbors in this time by keeping physically distant while looking out for the most vulnerable. We are called to slow down, to stop our rapid movement, to pray, and to consider the needs of our neighbors. So, may Jesus word be salve for anxious hearts, and permission for those of us who thrive on busyness. "Peace, be still". For in these words even the wind and the waves obey. Amen.

