

**Stormy Weather**  
Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins  
Sunshine Cathedral, June 21, 2009  
Psalm 9.1-2, 9-10; Mark 4.35-41

When I was about 16, I was coming out of the Piggly Wiggly supermarket and I saw my great-aunt Gladys loading her car with her groceries from her shopping cart. I decided that she needed help. She didn't ask for it, but I decided that she needed saving and who better to be her savior than me?

I walked right up to her as her back was turned to me, her arms full of groceries. With only about 8 inches between us, and her head turned away from me I said enthusiastically, "Let me help with that!" She almost dropped the bag of groceries, turned on her heels toward me with ninja like speed and the look of horror on her face seemed to say, "whistle in the left pocket, mace in the right, and knee in zap position...ready, set, go!"

After her terror and my humiliation subsided, she said, "no thank you, dear, I'm fine" and I schlepped off feeling quite defeated. After all, I only wanted to help...well, a pat on the head and "what a good nephew you are" would have been nice too, and frankly, I probably expected it. My intent was to help her, and maybe garner a little praise for myself. My impact was to startle an unsuspecting woman who was obviously quite independent and capable of handling her own affairs.

Even if I hadn't frightened her, I might still have insulted her. They were groceries, not cinder blocks. She wasn't an invalid. She had driven herself to the market, done her own shopping and wheeled her groceries to her own car. Who was I to decide that she even needed help? She might have felt disempowered rather than assisted, and in the final analysis, I had decided she wasn't capable of doing what was hers to do when in fact she had it under control. I wasn't helping her; I was helping my own ego needs, and just using her to make me feel good about me. God forgive me.

Since that tragic day in a parking lot some 26 years ago, I have been much more intentional about showing respect when I offer help, and honestly offering it before trying to force it on someone. I've learned to trust people to do what is theirs' to do; I've learned to expect others to give me that same trust and respect. I've learned to ask for help when I need it, and to allow others to do the same. I learned in that parking lot that dysfunctional rescuing does more harm than good. Our gospel lesson today shares a similar message.

Jesus has been ministering to people, praying for people, hearing about their healing needs, teaching and preaching...and frankly, he's tired. Instead of expecting Peter or John or Andrew to come up and rescue him, saying something like, "Hey, Jesus, you look really exhausted...why don't you try to steal some down time," he simply acknowledges his own need and initiates some self-care. Jesus says, "Let's take a boat ride and get away from the crowds for a little while." He doesn't blame others for not coming to his rescue, he empowers himself to not need rescuing. And he empowers others to do the same.

Jesus is worn ragged, and so as soon as he gets on a boat, he curls up on a cushion and falls asleep. Just a little quiet time; a little rejuvenating rest. Once renewed, he'll be back out there healing, teaching, preaching and making a difference in people's lives.

Now Jesus is a carpenter. Beyond that, he's become a teacher and healer. He knows what his gifts are. So, the people who fish for a living, who spend most of their lives in boats...he lets them do their job. You drive the boat, I'll take a nap. He doesn't get in the way (like I did with my great aunt Gladys). He doesn't assume that people can't do what is theirs' to do.

But when things get rough, notice how his friends react. In their fear, they go right to blame and accusation. They wake Jesus up with this nasty little insult, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?!”

Such drama. No one has fallen off the boat. No one has been struck by lightning. Yes, it’s windy, the waters are choppy, some water has spilled over into the boat. Yes, the situation requires careful attention. But no one is perishing so far. Why jump to the most negative possible conclusion, and then blame Jesus for not doing the same. Would his being as worked up as they were make the situation any better? Did their being a bunch of drama queens make the situation any better?

Jesus assumed that the skilled boat professionals had it under control. He had so much faith in them that he was sleeping through the stormy weather! And they repay his faith in them by blaming him for not being caught up in their drama. Jesus gets up and says, “Shut up. Be quiet.” Peace. Be still. Was he talking to the wind and waves of the storm, or to the wind of negative speech and the waves of unfettered panic in the boat? I’m inclined to believe the latter, because he follows up his remarks with this rebuke, “Why are you afraid? Don’t you have any faith?” *Don’t you believe you can handle this? Don’t you believe you are equal to the storms of life? Don’t you believe that together we can survive this challenge?* And they were in awe that Jesus maintained peace during the storm; his peace made the storm seem less stormy.

If we wait until the storm to look for peace, we’ll only panic and our panic will play into the drama of the storm, making the storm seem worse than it even is. We practice peace in the peaceful times so when the stormy weather hits, we have peace to experience, and to share. The person who has been practicing peace can calm the drama around her; she can say, “Calm down. Let’s focus on the solution instead of on the problem. Let’s generate hope instead of despair. Let’s go to peace instead of to pieces.”

Mark’s audience would have known the story of Jonah. Mark is playing with that story by showing a better outcome. Jonah was called to deal directly with people he didn’t like...he was to go to the capital of the Assyrian empire and share a divine message with them. But the Assyrians were the enemy of his people, and he didn’t want to even imagine that they were on God’s radar. So he takes a boat to Tarshish. He isn’t resting for continued ministry; he is running away from ministry. He’s not addressing a problem, he’s trying to go around it. That doesn’t really work. While on the boat, a storm attacks, and just like Jesus’ friends accuse him, the crew of Jonah’s boat wind up blaming him for the storm. So they toss him overboard, a big fish swallows him whole and spits him out...guess where...on the shores of the capital of Assyria! So Jonah half-heartedly preaches to the Assyrians, they embrace the power of hope, God seems to smile on them, and the story ends with Jonah being miserable. He spends the whole story trying to manipulate situations to get his way, and that never works out for him. And he never achieves peace.

Mark sort of retells the story with Jesus making healthier choices. Jesus doesn’t run away from ministry; he practices self-care so he can continue in ministry. Jonah never takes responsibility, never faces the challenges before him, and he is never happy. Jesus trusts people to be responsible, and when they don’t return that respect, he challenges them...saying, “don’t you believe in yourselves...in one another. Calm down. Be still. The storm will pass; why make it worse than it has to be with all this drama?” In Jonah’s story, the storm carries Jonah. In Jesus’ story, Jesus calms the storm. The difference? Attitude. What an important lesson for us.

Storms happen. The Sea of life is filled with the forces of chaos and potential danger. The winds blow, the thunder cracks, the waves crash, the sky grows dark...do we face it, or run from it? Are we like Jonah, or Jesus? Do we contribute to the drama, or do we affirm hope and healing? Do we go to peace, or to pieces?

***Do you not care that we are perishing?*** There's a three-point answer to that question:

- 1. Why assume the worst?** The truth is, they were not perishing and they made themselves more miserable by imagining the worst instead of working for the best
- 2. They forgot that they were in the boat together.** They had their skills. They had their intellects. They had their friends. They had Jesus. They had a wealth of resources to draw on. **Why not use what you have before giving in to panic and despair?**
- 3. Reacting to the drama makes us part of the drama.** The emotional storm in the boat was at least as dangerous as the stormy weather outside the boat. The answer to the storm that was causing the most trouble was simple – **Peace! Be Still. Calm down. Relax. Go to peace instead of to pieces.**

**Jesus didn't dysfunctionally rescue his friends. He believed in them. He let them do what was theirs' to do. He was available to help if they needed him and would ask; but he wasn't going to disempower him, insult them, or infantilize them. When they did ask for help, he proved he was willing to pitch in, but he also held them accountable for their attitudes. *Have some faith in yourselves, and in your friends. And don't be so quick to press the panic button.***

**The storms of life will happen; those who have practiced peace will have peace to share in those chaotic moments. Will we add to the chaos, or will we express the peace that is needed? Jesus shows us that we have a choice. And this is the good news. Amen.**

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**Today I choose hope.  
Today I choose joy.  
Today I choose peace.  
I am a person of power.  
I use my power wisely.  
And so it is!**