

“Have You No Faith?”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, June 20, 2021

Mark 4:35-41

It’s been a long day for Jesus and the disciples. He’s been teaching beside the sea, with large crowds gathering. There were so many people, Jesus actually had to get into a boat a little off shore in order to speak to so many gathered. At the end of this long day, he says to his disciples, ‘Time to get into the boat.’ “Let us go across to the other side.” They sail off, and soon the waves grow larger, the wind harder, and the water is crashing over the deck of the boat. The disciples, seasoned and veteran sailors, are starting to panic because of the severity of the weather and the response of the boat. The disciples are despairing. There’s no turning back. The boat is stalled because of the wild winds and waves. The boat feels like its sinking. And Jesus sleeps in the stern, head on a pillow. The disciples must have had a hasty meeting and made a decision to go wake up the only other person on the boat who didn’t know what was happening. “Wake up Jesus! Wake up! Do you not care that we’re perishing?”

Jesus, woken up from his sleep, his head still on the pillow, thinks ‘Now what?’ He stands up, and says to the wave and the wind, Peace! Be still! And the wind drops, and the waves disappear. And now there is silence and calm. And he says to the desperate disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

Stouffville United Church, through its long year of visioning work with the Futures Team, have been looking at different ways of being church that might look remarkably different from their church ten years ago. You are trying to hear God’s voice, as you begin to make real decisions about the future of your church. It is as if God is saying to Stouffville United, ‘Time to get into the boat.’ ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And you all get into the boat, and off you sail. And the clouds are getting darker, and the wind isn’t so gentle anymore, and the placid waters lapping the side of the boat are now coming over the bow and the spray is getting you all wet. And you’re not happy because so far this isn’t a pleasant voyage.

Stouffville United has found this part of the journey really tough. It’s not easy. Roadblocks, dead ends, lack of energy seem to plague every move. It’s as if you’ve stalled. You can’t go back. It’s hard to know if you’re making any progress. And in the midst of your struggles, Jesus is sleeping. You feel that the boat is in serious trouble and you don’t know how to fix it, and you want to wake up Jesus and say, ‘Come down and fix this!’ Bring the people back. Make the pews full. Bring the children back and Sunday School. Bring back the church we’ve known and loved. Bring back our people, our potlucks, our picnics, our worship, our singing. We don’t like this not knowing. We don’t like this not seeing. We don’t like difference. We don’t want to go to the other side.

And yet, isn’t that what Jesus is about? Going to the other side? Jesus crossed over to the other side all the time, when he ate with sinners and prostitutes, when he ‘worked’ on the Sabbath, when he associated with ‘unclean’ people.¹ He was always going to the other side of

¹ [Commentary on Mark 4:35-41 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) Accessed June 19, 2021.

what was ‘acceptable’, what was allowed. He was always going to the other side to show us what we were missing. Relationship. Community. Justice.

Do we forget that Jesus is in the boat with us? And even if he is sleeping, I’d take a sleeping Jesus any day over a congregation that is asleep. I’m not so concerned about Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat as I am about the people in the church sleeping, sleeping through the real crisis we face as a church. How to be the church in a secular world. How to be church in a world that seems to have forgotten us. This gospel account is about waking up *the people*, not waking up Jesus.

Our biblical story tells us time and time again that when someone is going across to the other side, God has always been with them. From Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, to Joshua and the people crossing over the River Jordan to the promised land, to Ruth, who left her people and her homeland, to go with Naomi, even to the Apostle Paul who transitioned across a huge identity change from persecutor to follower.

God is always with those who cross to the other side. Call it transitional, call it new direction, call it finding one’s path, God is always with anyone who is making the brave decision to change course, to accept newness, to grow into a new identity.

Change the template of how you manage life in the boat. Instead of fear, remember trust. Instead of chaos, remember calm. Instead of routine, remember risk. Trust. Calm. Risk. All demonstrated by the one who slept in the back of the boat.

As a commentary notes, “Even though there are real and fearsome things in this life, they need not paralyze us; they need not have dominion over us; they need not own us, because we are not alone in the boat.”² Stouffville United, *you are not alone in the boat*. Jesus is in the boat.

So, wake up! Wake up dear church! to see those places, where even now, the chaos is lessening; where even now, the rough winds of bad news are giving way to the surer breezes of affirmation; where even now, a song of gladness is beginning to find its first notes.

Stouffville United Church, take the risk to go to the other side, because Jesus *is* in the boat.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

² Feasting on the Word Commentary, Pastoral Perspective, 168.