

Scriptures:

1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Mark 4:35-41

### **Just a Boat**

So as you can imagine when I first read the scriptures for this morning I could relate in more ways than one. It would be easy for me to start naming for you what have felt like Goliath moments in the last while. How I've felt like David, just a shepherd boy who carries no status, and gets little respect. I can tell you what it feels like to be going through a storm and wonder "Jesus where are you?" and "God, do you really have a plan in this?" But as I started to look at the scriptures a little more, and as I read a brilliant commentary from Karoline Lewis I began to re-think where this scripture might take us today.

Let's look at the gospel today and look at it more literally than we often do. What I mean is sometimes a boat is just a boat. Sometimes the Goliath story is just a story of a young boy who faced a road block and got past it.

"There is no end to sermons on this gospel story that allegorize the boat, and, for that matter, everything else in this sea passage tale.

You know how these sermons tend to go -- "Jesus is in the boat with you." "How many times does it feel like you are in a storm and Jesus is asleep?" "What boats are you in at this point in your life?" "What are the storms that are tossing your life around?" None of this is necessarily bad. It's just that the boat becomes a metaphor for all kinds of things rather than simply what it is -- a traveling vessel. A means by which to get from one place to another."<sup>1</sup>

Today I invite you to imagine with me that the boat in this story is, well... simply a boat. And that the point of this story is Jesus is trying to get to the other side, and we as the disciples in the boat are trying to get to the other side also. In fact, perhaps Jesus is trying to get us to the other side, because left to our own devices, we'd rather stay where we are. "That's human nature. But it also seems to be the nature of faith. We can't seem to hear Jesus' invitation -- "Let us go across to the other side." How easy it is to stay in our comfort zones; to default to our pet theologies; to remain in what is known, even though that which is known has become unbearable. We would rather ignore the desperate need for change than make the change happen. So we sit. And we wait. For what? The right time? For someone else to make the first move? Maybe this is why Jesus doesn't give the disciples any time to think about the trip"<sup>2</sup>

James Boyce wrote "On that day." The phrase is so brief the reader could almost ignore it. Actually, this short transition is vastly important for setting the stage for this familiar story of the stilling of the storm. In the order of the original Greek, the text would read "and he continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Karoline <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3645>

<sup>2</sup> IBID

speak to them on that day ... ” The important effect is to remind us that this story comes right on the heels of all of Jesus’ special teaching to his disciples on the nature of the kingdom -- on his characterization of that kingdom as couched in hiddenness and secrecy, and of its requiring a special gift of hearing to comprehend. So it should not surprise us if the journey of discipleship, and the course of our journeys in this Pentecost season should at times be fraught with unexpected dangers or risks.”<sup>3</sup> “On that day “ Jesus swept them away on the boat to take the next step in the journey. I wonder if in this day and age anyone would trust a leader that much, or did Jesus simply have such ‘holy’ authority that they followed? Because we know that left to our own devices We would think about it forever. “Thinking about it” is always one of our best excuses. We as a culture and people create confusions, fears, and questions before they even exist.

But moving forward, moving on in faith is what Jesus is all about. Karoline Lewis writes “Here’s the problem, as if there is only one, with Jesus. He seems rather dissatisfied with letting us live on one side of the lake for too long. So he takes the disciples to the other side. And getting to the other side is no easy trip. Nor should we expect that to be the case. When we over-sentimentalize or spiritualize this story we end up overlooking the obvious -- that this boat trip was a means by which to get from one place to another. And, something equally as obvious -- that change, trading spaces, is rarely without its challenges. Getting to the other side means a boat ride for sure, a torrential downpour, and dead calm. That’s what happens when Jesus tries to move us from one place to another. But that’s also the nature of change.”<sup>4</sup>

As the minister of Squamish United I can assure you that this journey towards another way has come with questions, concerns, worries. We have spent a lot of time wondering if we should get in the boat, and then how to get in the boat, and how the boat might carry us to the other side. Who should drive the boat? Lets be honest, some folks even chose to get out of the boat before it left the shore. But I can also tell you that stepping out as they have has required a lot of faith and work and preparation and trust and it will continue to. So, I guess I’m using the boat as a metaphor after all but...Between you and me I am quite proud of Squamish United Church folks for the risks of faith they have allowed this Pentecost Spirit to move them towards. And the folks from St. John’s you also have taken great risk allowing us to be with you as we discover our way, and move to the ‘other side of the lake.’ You too are now on the journey with us, and we feel supported by that.

See, “If the disciples had said to Jesus, “Well, what if there is a storm?” they would have never gotten into the boat because there are always storms on the Sea of Galilee and when you least expect it. If the disciples had said to Jesus, “Well, first tell us what’s on the other side?” they would have never gotten into the boat because what ended up happening in the country of the Gerasenes?”<sup>5</sup> Would you if you knew that on the other side you were going to encounter a demon-possessed guy who lives in the cemetery. And you are going to send his demons into a herd of two thousand pigs. And then the pigs are going to go jump in the lake?” I think that

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<sup>3</sup> Boyce, James [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2470](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2470)

<sup>4</sup> Lewis

<sup>5</sup> Lewis

might be an adventure I would chose to avoid for safety sake. I might assure Jesus I believe he can do it but I have a family back home and I am sure they would want me to stay as far away from demon possession as possible.

Most of us in life and faith are willing to stay right where we are. It may or may not be working, but at least it is familiar. Right? We do that in many storms in life whatever they may be. So often we stay in that bad job - because we have one, or that abusive relationship - because we have a relationship, at least we are not alone. Sometimes we continue to carry on our addictions because it would be a lot of work to get to the other side and many of us don't even know what life would look like if we let go of those things. I had someone ask me a few times this week "Do people know why they come to church?" "Do they even think about it?" "Do they even care?" Those may sound like harsh questions, some of you may even struggle to answer them, and yet when you are coming to church in a time such as this you may come up with those questions more often than not. I say that because the structures and functions of Christianity and all world religions are changing at a rapid pace these days. Tradition and faith are critical at this time, but so is getting in the boat and discovering where the holy is taking us.

The hardest thing is getting into the boat. You just have to get into the darn boat.

Because the necessity of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac necessitates a relocation. Not only a change of place but a change of space that puts us in the rather uncomfortable presence of the possessed. You know this. To have something change you must be willing to step out in faith. St. John's folks have had several changes in priests, in process, in bishops, in the way things are done over the last years, and I am sure there is some anxiety about how things will look in the weeks, months and years to come for you as a community of faith even with out us United Church folks crowding your pews.

Perhaps you all feel like Nick and I are asking both congregations to cross to the other side of the lake, to make a change that definitely resembles a lake-crossing adventure, of sorts, perhaps of squall-like proportions. And well. I don't think you would be wrong in that. But I think, and I believe many of you know that staying where you are would be a harder decision.

Now I want to point something else out in the text "Notice that Jesus does not say "*You* go over to the other side," but "Let *us* go over to the other side." Jesus was there all along, no matter what Jesus was doing, whether that be preaching about parables or sleeping on a pillow."

I know, because I have heard it in some conversations from folks this week (not literally but figuratively) some folks feel like asking the question "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" I have heard it in the anxiety and concerns that in the midst of this major journey across the lake in the midst of the possibility of great storms. So let me remind you "You are not alone." "You are not abandoned." With Julian of Norwich I remind you "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." I am a firm believer that God provides all that we need. In the next weeks and months as you journey together in this boat to the other side of the lake, there will be waves, and showers, hopefully not too many squalls but if we remember together our foundations and our purposes. If we remember as Nick said the other day what are the questions of the gospel. If we together follow the great commandment to love God, one another and self. Nothing will deter us on the journey. Love and life will win.

And perhaps the greatest promise of this text is "that there is something on the other side that Jesus knows about -- and needs to get us to. Of course, the reality for the disciples, and for us, is

that the other side is not all that rosy. It has its own set of challenges -- the disciples have to see Jesus differently, themselves differently. It means living into a new reality. And that takes some getting used to. Because when your location changes so does your perspective and others' perspective of you. When your location changes, so do you. That's pretty much how change works.

When I think about changes needed in our world today I think about the racism we have seen this week in Canada and the U.S. In Pender Harbour and South Carolina. It is hard for me to believe or understand the level of disgust some hold for another human being because of the colour of their skin or the culture they are from. But if we are willing to face the change, if we are willing to look at our part and move forward in truth and reconciliation, in forgiveness and trust, in turning our lives in a new direction perhaps we will get to the other side.

“Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong.” (Mandy Hale)

Perhaps the act of faith is not just the trust that Jesus will still the storm. The act of faith is taking Jesus' invitation to heart. The act of faith is getting into the boat. The act of faith is believing that another side is not only possible, it is essential.”<sup>6</sup>

And there is one thing I am sure of and that is. Once the disciples finished their journey with Jesus, once they were transformed in faith and new life, once they saw what it was to live calling forth the kingdom of God - they did not want to go back. They were thankful they got in the boat and allowed the journey of faith with Jesus transform them.

So on this day. On my last day with you for a few months, I want to thank you all for stepping out in faith, for getting in the boat, for joining us in the journey. And as we continue this process may we always remember God is with us. Even if it seems like Jesus is sleeping he is present, and is saying Peace be still in the midst of every storm, question, worry and risk we face.

Thanks be to God.  
Amen

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis