

Squamish United Church/First United Salmon Arm
Rev. Karen Millard

July 20, 2021

Scriptures:

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

Mark 4:35-41

It's a Little Bit Stormy

First United Salmon Arm and Squamish United Church I am so happy to be with you both again in this way.

Since I last met with you across the screen it has been a bit of a whirlwind and the last few weeks have been overwhelming to say the least and yet my heart is full.

Why a whirlwind?

Well it's felt a bit stormy?

In the last couple of weeks I have felt a lot like many of the characters in our biblical texts. So much so that you might want to skip the sermon and just spend some time with the word because those scriptures are packed with lessons for every one of us.

Yes, recently admittedly I have felt like some of the leaders of Israel. Not Saul or David but the doubting ones. The ones standing on the edge looking down on the valley of Elah overwhelmed with fear.

I have also felt like a little girl kneeling at the side of Mamquam river sifting through the smooth stones collecting them for my slingshot hoping and praying God will direct me with the courage and strength and leadership I need to face the giants of the day.

In the last couple of weeks I have cried out with the disciples "Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?" We had a board retreat yesterday and I asked the question in one word how are you feeling this week and the answers ranged from hopeful, to confused, to curious, to anxious and a mixture of all of the above.

Now, Just in case you don't know why one little minister or a group of church folks might have felt that way I will give you a bit of a peek into the window of our souls. Be warned it isn't pretty and its filled with challenges potentially every one of needs to face.

Let's start with the world wide pandemic we are still in the midst of.

Almost every day I watch the news about what is happening in BC with Covid numbers, almost every day I watch what is happening in the world news and I want to rejoice with everyone getting vaccines, or watching the numbers go down. Text messages coming to me with excitement about places of worship opening and then being in meetings with officials saying "please be cautious" just because you can open doesn't mean you should. And I see other

countries shutting back down and I think “I don’t have the answer” “shouldn’t I have the answer.” What are we supposed to do? What is faithful? And when we do come back together how do we do it? What is changed? How do we get back to our purpose? How do we be faithful architects of the church of 2021?

And that questions gets wrapped up in the news of 215 children’s’ bodies discovered at a residential school and I think “Oh crap” (that is the censored version) we knew one day this would come, we were told, we were warned. It is less shocking and more deep remembering. And I realize that the lives and deaths of these children are going to lead us if we let them. And as hard and heartbreaking as it is I know there is not a choice but to enter into this story and begin a new journey with my indigenous neighbours, acknowledging the brutal history that is ours in ways I have not for some time. It is time once again to let them teach us, and to hear their stories and pray and weep and morn and grieve with them. And we know this is just the beginning and so I worshiped with and prayed with my indigenous friends and we led a memorial service together and there we had holy moments last week.

The news didn’t end there though did it. We have been starkly reminded that we can’t just look across the border and judge them for hate and racism. As a muslim family is run down and left on a street corner dead from a hate crime.

Social media, news, instagram, Facebook feeds are flooded with hate towards all religion and I get it, I understand it deep in my soul and I weep with those who weep and I rage with my internal rage (because that’s how I rage). And I gather with a group of colleagues and we weep together and we morn together and we cry out “Oh God, forgive them, forgive us, transform us, stop the storm.” And then I feel guilty because how dare we even want the pain to stop for so many have lived this pain for a lifetime.

And it is in that state that I realize I really have to tell Salmon Arm what I am going to be preaching on, I really have to send you the scriptures and I open up the lectionary and I start to read the scriptures and my breath is taken away as I read the oh so familiar stories of our faith, and I remember, oh I remember why we hold this tradition, why we read these scriptures it is for moments just like these.

Because this year, this month I have stood on the cliffside and I have heard Goliath roar and I have imagined putting on the armour of the warrior and it has felt too heavy and I have wondered if I should give in. And then Nadia Bolz Webber blessed us at the pacific mountain regional meeting with her words and her wisdom and she said “Nothing is God’s Favourite Material” She reminded us that in fact it is true that we don’t have what it takes to get through this but in fact we have the God that it takes to get through this. As we become nothing God can work with us.

See if you feel like the disciples crying out in fear right now you are in good company. You are not the only one who has forgotten at times who God is, who Jesus is. The fact is this is no ordinary storm we are facing, this is no ordinary lake. This is a big, big storm on a lake that we

don't know but Jesus he hasn't left the boat. He is looking at us and at the storm of the world and he is saying peace be still. Peace be still.

Do you hear it?

Do you feel it?

Do you know that you are not alone?

Do you know that God is still with us?

Way ahead of us... at the threshold of the transformation of our lives.

Ah friends. I have been hearing it from preachers and speakers since Covid began. This is an opportunity for transformation in our lives, in our faith, in our churches, in our communities. Let's not let it go by without letting the spirit lead us in ways we have not allowed for a long, long time.

First Community, First United Salmon Arm, Squamish United Church you have risked, you have been faithful for many years. You haven't settled into the status quo, you have engaged the spirit and you have trusted that God is with you and will lead you. Today as you engage the hard stories of our world remember Jesus hasn't left the boat, He is standing right there with us offering peace.

May we know the holy presence with us today in such a way that we can truly say even now. My heart is Full. God is with us. We are not alone.

Amen.