

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • September 12, 2021



The Scripture
Mark 4:35-41

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 windstorm 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?”

The Message
“Courageous: Braving Trust”
Mark Briley

What if I told you that the greatest enemy to the life you *want* may be the life that you're *living*? Could it be? Could it be that you long for a life of peace and connectedness – a connection with God, with your family, with your friends, with your community – but fear has consumed you, and you just can't see any life beyond your current storm, so you disconnect? And what if I told you that your life is always moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts? Could *that* possibly be? And “*What are my strongest thoughts?*” you're now thinking. Your strongest thoughts are guiding your steps... or paralyzing you from moving at all. Paul, writing to Christians in Philippi, says it this way. “*What's your prevailing thought?*” What are you focused on? That prevailing thought is determining or hindering your progress forward.

I was talking to a friend this week – he’s been going through a bit of a rough patch. Lots of external challenges that have added to any challenge he has internally or relationally. And this otherwise optimistic, positive, always forward-thinking friend of mine was “*edgy*” as he called it. And that edge was guiding his strongest thoughts. His thoughts became negative, resentful to those he loved the most, and were holding him back from progressing toward the life he knows, loves and is working toward most days of his life. And *you* know this kind of stuck too, right? I call it a funk.

Sometimes I just find myself in a bit of a funk. I know I have nothing to complain about, nothing to truly fret, nothing to fear or be down about... but I’m just in a funk. Most often, it’s a time when I’m trying to control things that are not mine to control. Or... my will is pushing against the grain of wisdom or shoving God’s leading in my life aside and I’m just pushing back. It takes so much energy to be ‘*against*,’ you know?

So, my friend calls me, and he says, “*I just needed you to know, I let it go. I was fighting it and pushing against it, and I realized that every time I’ve faced something like this, God has always brought about something better. **Every** time.*”

It didn’t mean that it was going to be easy stepping through some of the obstacles ahead, but he was relinquishing his resistance that built on stubborn fear or his own desire for control. When he decided to trust, he immediately felt this peace wash over him. “*I just wanted you to know.*” And we offered a prayer of gratitude right there over the phone. In that moment, both of our energies shifted from the tension of that resistance into the pursuit of the next good thing God has before us. Our prevailing thought shifted to something productive and healthy, not fearful, and resistant. That changes everything.

What if I told you, this is what happens when we quit chasing a life that will still leave us anxious and empty when we find it and we start living a faith that trusts God to carry the day?

We pick up the life of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel after a long stretch of teaching. Jesus is dropping parables and stories and making volcanos as teaching experiments – whatever it takes to make a connection with somebody. He could make a lesson of faith or a description of heaven out of whatever you could pull out of your pocket right now. He was so gifted in this way. But it’s also exhausting, right teachers?

You come off that Friday in the classroom – the students are in rare form ‘cause *everybody’s workin’ for the weekend*. You wore your favorite team’s jersey because you know, spirit day, and you get home and are ready to collapse from an exhausting week of educating people in whatever subject is yours to impart. Jesus has this Friday

collapse in our text for today. He taught his heart out all week; the squad loads up in the boat along with him to head on their way, and after turning on his slow jams playlist, the next thing Jesus does is find a spot to take a nap. A storm brews quickly on this lake as it is apt to do given the conditions of that specific place, but Jesus snores right through it as it swells. The disciples know Jesus needs the rest. They don't really want to wake him. And most of them are boat people after all – it's not like this is their first storm at sea. They've been here before.

Haven't you been in such a space? You get your life in the same predicament that you've been before. It's not a new storm per say, but you get worked up about it every time, nonetheless. And in these moments, we can get all consumed with worst-case scenarios that we miss all the signals that point to this as an experience we've overcome before. We'll be just fine if we employ what we already know about navigating these situations with courage. The key is to stay clear and focused. Remember what you know to do, what you're trained to do, and why you're doing it in the first place.

There was a minister, who accepted the invitation by a church to move his family, lead their church, and serve their community. The *TnT* – twenties and thirties – group showed up at the parsonage to help unload the moving truck. One of the churches more seasoned small groups filled the parsonage pantry with food. Others offered gift cards to their favorite local restaurants. So nice! The search committee leader had the new minister and his family over to their home for a celebration cookout with the committee. Everything just felt right, and the pastor was almost giddy. Standing around the grill, the pastor said, *"You can't imagine how great it feels to come to a church knowing you were selected by unanimous vote."* The guy flipping burgers said, *"Well, it was practically unanimous."* *"What do you mean, 'practically unanimous'?"* *"Well, you know, it was practically unanimous."* *"Practically unanimous?"* *"Well, let's just say it was unanimous."* *"Well... but what... what was it really?"* *"Well,"* the grill master said, *"the vote was 234 to 2."*

The minister left the conversation where it was – right there with the mustard and relish, but to himself he thought... *'Two 'no' votes? I wonder who they are?'* The next six months, he's consumed finding out who the two are. The following six months, he does whatever he can to please those two. At the end of the year, he is fired – 2 in favor of him, 234 against.¹

Who do you trust? Who are you trying to please? And why do we so easily get thrown off track from what we already know we are called to be about? Well... sometimes we just do, right?

¹ Craddock Stories. Edited by Mike Graves and Richard Ward. Pg. 42-43. Chalice Press. St. Louis. 2001.

The disciples are thrown. They know the boat. They know the sea. They know the storms. Sometimes the answer to our prayers is already inside of us – already in the wisdom of our experiences – already grounded in the trust of the relationship we formed with Jesus over time and that has gotten us through similar moments before.

It's like what I ask my daughter who has been driving me around town as a permit driver for the better part of the last year. Whenever we're out and about and she wants to drive home, she gets all strapped in, mirrors adjusted and ready to roll, and I ask, "*How do we get home from here?*" I trust what she already knows... the times we've been in that area before and had to make our way. And sometimes she's uncertain, and I'll ask again because I know she knows... she just hasn't centered herself quite yet. "*How do we get home from here?*"

But... the disciples panic, they don't trust what they already know, and they rattle Jesus awake. Do you like being abruptly awakened? They're lucky Jesus didn't come up swinging. And they are lost in their own panic. Their prevailing thought? "*We're all going to die here, Jesus... don't you give a rip?*" What's really going on here? Are they concerned with Jesus own wellbeing – like, "*Hey, JC, we thought you'd want to know about the storm?*" Do they need him to grab an extra bucket and start dumping water overboard? "*We're all trying to do our part here!*" Or... do they really just want Jesus to fix it. That really kind of seems what they want. "*Fix it, Jesus!*" We've all be there. We're tired, angry, frustrated, done-with-people, and we just want it fixed. But if that's all this story is about, then it's just a once-and-done marvel moment when Jesus yelled at the waves to "*Knock it off!*" and the storm quit. Epic, yes. I'm here for it. True. But...

What if I told you, it's not about that meteorological miracle at all? Now that they've focused a bit more, Jesus says, "*Why are you still so afraid?*" Do not fear, right? You've heard enough preachers tell you that it says, "*Do not be afraid*" 365 times in the Bible – once for every day of the year. "*Why are you still so afraid?*" He asks. "*We just got off a long day of teaching – you nodded your head all day long like you got it, you're in it to win it... the whole thing. But the storm comes and Boom! You forgot everything we learned... you forgot who we are, who we can be and who you're rollin' with.*" And then that cutting line, "*Have you no faith?*"

I must say... I don't like the question. "*In fact, Jesus, one of your lessons was about even a little bit of faith... the size of a mustard seed... being enough to move mountains. Of course, I have faith. And are you saying that if I had enough faith, I wouldn't have needed you to get the storm to chill out?*" This becomes a dangerous theological slippery slope. I've walked too closely with people... even this week... people who are on the edge, people who have experienced unthinkable loss, people who are suffering without any helpful explanation. Would some larger measure of faith

have shifted their situation, their storms, the outcome they now are trying to sort through? I cannot tell a mother who has lost her child or a friend who is devastated about a transition in their life or a family whose lives are forever altered by a moment's mistake that a larger measure of faith would have saved the loved one, prevented the disease, protected from injury.

What if, instead, Jesus is talking about trust? After all, "*trust*" is often a better translation of the word "*faith*" when it comes to the original biblical languages. And what is trust? A firm belief in the reliability of something. It's like my friend who came around to the relinquishing of his resistance that was built on fear. He remembered his own trust in God. God has been a reliable presence in his life. He shifted his prevailing thought to trust, not skeptical distrust. Not simple but effective.

So, what do *you* trust about God? I trust God to hold my life with me – to be present with me through the storms and the valley of the darkest shadows. I trust that God has brought people into my life that I need to learn from... that I need to partner with... that somehow, when combining what I know and what they know... we can calm some storms in this world together. I trust that. Trust is my prevailing thought. It's my stabilizing force. It's ground zero.

It's not about being comfortable. Someone said, "*I've spent my whole life becoming more and more comfortable. I have a house, a car, a boat. Heck, I have a cat I don't even want. What I've discovered,*" he said, "*is that comfortable people don't need Jesus.*" It's not about being safe. God's not leading us to the safest path forward, but to the one where we'll grow the most. Sometimes God calms the storm... and sometimes God calms you in the middle of it.

Writer and theologian, Frederick Buechner, sat in his car, parked by the roadside, terribly depressed and afraid about his daughter's life-threatening battle with an eating disorder and all that what was going on with his family at the time. He wrote this: "*Out of nowhere a car came along down the highway with a license plate that bore on it the one word out of all the words in the dictionary that I needed most to see exactly then. The word was **TRUST**. What do you call a moment like that? Something to laugh off as the kind of joke life plays on us every once in a while? The word of God? I am willing to believe that maybe it was something of both, but for me it was an epiphany. The owner of the car turned out to be, as I'd suspected, a trust officer in a bank, and not long ago, having read an account I wrote of the incident somewhere, he found out where I lived and one afternoon brought me the license plate itself, which sits propped up on a bookshelf in my house to this day. It is rusty around the edges and a little battered, and it is also as holy a relic as I have ever seen.*"²

² <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/12/17/trust>

Braving trust is a vulnerable practice. It takes courage. And it's not a once and for all situation. For the disciples, another storm would come again someday at sea. For Buechner? His beloved daughter still had a battle with an eating disorder. For you? You've got your thing, too. Can you hear Jesus asking you, "*Have you no trust?*" And I ask... Can you brave TRUST?



Derek Jeter – greatest Yankee of all-time – was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame this past week. As part of his acceptance speech, as he stood on the stage with the other inductees, he said, "*The one common thread with all of us here on stage is that we understand that there's no one individual bigger than the game. The game goes on. So, take care of it, protect it, respect it, don't take the time you have to play for granted.*"

The time we have is the time we have. The time we must accomplish what is ours to do... to progress our lives forward, society forward, the Body of Christ forward... is *this* time that we cannot take for granted. The only time we know we have for sure is right *now*. Don't let fear hinder your progress forward. Don't let the unknown or the uncertain or the storms of any kind, keep us from trusting God that we can press forward courageously. Let's keep our trust in God as our guiding and prevailing thought.

What if I told you we can change our city for *good* and *for* the good? What if I told you we can do something together that seems as impossible as convincing a wave to flatten itself but is possible because of who God is and who God says we can be? And when we do this... because we can... may we be the voice of modern-day disciples that ask, "*Who is this Lord that even injustices are made right; even division becomes unified; even the cancelled become the called, even the waves obey and bow down?*" He is Jesus. He is Jesus.

Song of Focus

"Help Me Remember"

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. When seeking right directions
to do the things I must,
overwhelmed by obligations
(push much harder and I'll bust!),

'cause I press against windy currents,
losing traction with each gust,
help me, my God, to remember
in whose hands I put my trust.

2. When questions overwhelm me,
and I pull back non-plussed,
and I wonder if it's worth it
(won't it just end up as dust?)
Calm my soul, renew my focus,
speak to me in stillness hushed,
to help me, God, remember
in whose hands I put my trust.

Bridge:

In that trust, I rise to courage.
In that trust, I find great strength.
And I watch for your direction
to more clearly see and think.
In that trust, I will go forward
and with confidence set sail
through each storm and past each barrier
in a faith that does not fail.

3. Our God, lead us as your people
toward a world that's just,
joyful in the confidence of a faith
full and robust
with a life that lives out your love
in step with heaven's pulse.
Help us, our God, remember
in whose hands we put our trust.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH