

In the boat

Mark 4:35-41

June 24, 2012

Let's review ...

Who's in the boat? Jesus, and his disciples. Jesus' disciples were in the boat, with him.

Why were they in the boat? They were in the boat because they had already decided they were going wherever Jesus was going. If he wanted to go to the other side of the lake, they were going with him.

Of course, because they were in the boat with Jesus, when the storm came, they were caught in the middle of it. If they had not gotten in the boat, if they had stayed behind, if they had gone home, if they had decided to go back to their lives as they were before they met Jesus, they would not have been out on the lake, in the middle of the storm, about to die. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to go with Jesus!

On the other hand, if they had stayed behind, who knows what might have befallen them. Life is full of storms. full of dangers, full of daunting terrors, not just out on the water in a boat. Another way of looking at what did happen is this: when the storm came, they were in the boat, with Jesus. When the storm came, they were with Jesus and Jesus was with them!

Are you in the boat? Have you already decided to follow Jesus, to go where he goes, to be where he is? When the storms come, are you with him? Is he with you? Are you in the boat, with Jesus?

Get in the boat!

Let's review ...

Is it safe in the boat? Yes! By all means, yes! It's safe in the boat. It may be scary, but it's safe. Jesus' disciples did not die in the storm. Once you get in the boat with Jesus, you will not be immune from bad weather. Storms will come. In fact, if you do get in the boat with Jesus, it is rather more likely you will encounter storms. After all, you will be out on the open water, you will be going to new places, you will not be just staying close to home, staying where things seem to be tame and familiar and safe.

Sure it might seem prudent, if safety is your first concern, to stay out of the boat, to remain on shore. But what if you did? What if they did? What if Jesus' disciples had stayed on shore? What if they had gone home, gone back to their former lives, gone back to the old realities, the old way of doing things, the old way of seeing things?

Would they have been safer? No, they were just as safe out on the water in the boat. But if they had remained on shore, they would not have been with Jesus.

They would not have made the crossing with him to the other side of the lake. They would not have seen the man come to him out of the caves, out from among the burial caves, the man possessed, the man tormented and uncontrollable, the man wandering day and night among the tombs, screaming and cutting himself. They would not have seen Jesus set him free.

If the disciples had not chosen to get in the boat, do you suppose Jesus would have crossed to the other side, by himself? If they were his followers, he was their leader -- their leader and their servant. He was the one who had chosen them, invited them, the one who was loving them, teaching them, showing them. I don't think Jesus would have crossed the lake if his disciples had not gone with him, if they had not taken him, and what then would have become of that tortured, tormented man?

Get in the boat!

Get in the boat! Go with Jesus, because Jesus goes with you! Don't be frightened! It's safe. Yes, storms will come. Yes, your eyes will be opened to the torment and pain and despair of the human beings who share this earth with you, but it will be safe. You will be safe, and you may well play a part in bringing Jesus to someone who needs him.

Let's review ...

Do you need a lot of faith to get in the boat? Apparently not! "Do you still have no faith?," Jesus asked his frightened disciples.

They must have had some faith. After all, they did get in the boat. They had seen enough of him and heard enough from him that they were still following this man for whom they had left everything else behind.

Or maybe it wasn't yet faith. Maybe it was desire, longing, hunger, thirst. Desire for something more out of life. Longing for God's kingdom, for God's kingdom to come at last to supersede and redeem the kingdoms of this world. Hunger for a new way of being; hunger for a new way of being together. Thirst

for life; thirst for God. Yes, they had made sacrifices to be with him, to follow him, but they were not yet the noble sacrifices of joyful souls made from a position of strength and certainty, but the desperate sacrifices of thirsty and needy souls made because they had little to lose and so much to gain.

To have faith in Jesus means to know him, to know who he is and what he is about, to know him and love him and trust him and rely on him ... utterly. But they didn't know who he was or what he was about! "Who is this man?," they said, as if they had no idea who it was who was in the boat with them!

And they didn't. They didn't have any idea, yet, who it was who was in the boat with them.

Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!

Yes, indeed, who is this man?

Faith is a matter of coming to terms with who Jesus is, who Jesus really is. If Jesus is no more than a friend, no more than a comforting presence, no more than a resource to call on in time of need -- if Jesus is no more than a teacher, no more than a role model, no more than an especially good human being worthy of admiration and emulation, from a comfortable distance, of course -- if Jesus is no more than an intriguing stop on your spiritual journey -- you don't know him!

Watch! Listen! Pay attention! Follow! Want nothing more than to know him, and you will. You will begin to know something of this One who is much more intimidating than any storm, this One who will disturb you and delight you and scare you and draw you as nothing ever has or ever will.

But you don't have to be there to get in the boat. You don't have to know him, really know him, really appreciate who he is. You don't have to have much faith or any faith at all. You just have to get in when he says, "Let's go."

Get in the boat!

Let's review ...

Is it safe outside the boat? Is it safe for all those who, for whatever reason, are not in the boat?

The story of Jesus calming the wind and the waves is told in three of the four gospels, in Matthew and Mark and Luke, but only Mark's account includes this one barely noticeable sentence: "Other boats were there too."

Other boats were there too! Where? Out on the lake! Out on the lake in the midst of the storm! Other boats too were caught in the storm, the lives of their occupants too in peril.

And what happened to these other boats, to these other people? The story does not mention them again, but what do you suppose became of them? When the wind and the waves were stilled, they were safe too!

Why were they safe? Because of Jesus! They weren't in the boat with Jesus, but they were safe because of Jesus!

Jesus didn't bring the boat in which he sat safely through the storm. He calmed the storm itself! He didn't merely provide a safe path through the dangers and terrors of this world. He changed the world! And that's precisely what awed and frightened his disciples: "Who is this man?"

Who is this man and what is he about? Surely far more than we realize or even begin to understand! He may be the one who saves you, your personal savior, but he is far more than that. He is the savior, he is the one who saves, this world! It doesn't depend on what we do, but on what he does. It's not about our faith in him, but about who he is.

Then why get in the boat?

Why get in the boat if it's just as safe outside the boat? You know why! Because Jesus is in the boat! Because you want to be with him, because you need to be with him, because you want to know him, because you want to go where he's going.

Get in the boat!

It will be exhilarating, overwhelming, astonishing, gratifying, sometimes frightening, always safe ... always the right place to be, always the right One to be with.

Get in the boat!