

# “God Cares”

Psalm 46 & Mark 4:35-41

Pastor James York

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Mark was a concise writer, so every phrase abounds with insights revealing the good news of the Kingdom of God. **“On that day, when evening had come,”** Jesus was teaching, healing, and caring for everyone all day. Mark shares three of Jesus parables: the four soils, the growing seed, and the mustard seed.

**“Jesus said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’”** What is other? Who is on the other side? Do we need to cross over to the other side to repent, to be transformed, to enjoy abundant life? What are the differences between our side and their side? Culturally, Jesus was asking to go from the Jewish side to the Gentile side. The crossing is a sign that God cares for all people. Jesus came to teach, heal, and save the chosen religious people and the wandering unreligious. Morally, Jesus was asking to go from the “clean” side to the “unclean” side. Jesus cares for all people. Jesus came to make the unclean, sinful, violent, irreverent, hateful, and cheating, clean. Socially, Jesus was seeking to reconcile the two sides, to bridge the waters, to bring all people together. God cares for every person. Each person has a cherished place in God’s eternal family.

**“And leaving the crowd behind,”** What do you need to leave behind in order to love all people? What do you need to let go of to enjoy your better side? Think about your relationships. What do you need to leave behind, so your relationships will flourish? Did they leave behind the crowd to leave behind prejudices, judgements, superiority, and religious barriers?

Jesus first words that are illustrated throughout Mark are: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Mark 1:15 NRSV** Jesus commands us to repent, to leave behind our sin, to go across to the other side, from fearful hate to love, from self-centered to God centered, from chaos to peace, from anguish to joy, from negativity to hope, from loneliness to community, from shameful guilt to forgiveness. God cares about all of us, both sides of us. God is not trying to get rid of our messed up side. God is cleaning up our messed up side to make us whole.

**“They took Jesus with them in the boat, just as he was.”** How is God your life-boat? People have made connections between the boat and Noah’s ark. A saving boat that takes us from sinful, self-destruction to a fresh start and a joyful, loving, abundant life. Connections have been made between the boat and the Jonah story. Jonah was fearful to cross to the other side, to spread the Good News to the despised, sinful Ninevites. Eventually, a journey on a boat enabled Jonah to deliver God’s message to those on the other side. Many Biblical scholars believe the boat is symbolizing the church. Each of us in the church is to be a vessel of God’s caring love. Together as a church we are called to reconcile the world, to bridge every divide, to love every person.

**“They took Jesus with them in the boat, just as he was.”** Who is Jesus? Is there a difference between what we have been taught, what we now think we know, and who Jesus really is? How should we react to the many different views of who Jesus is? Mark has already shared how Jesus’ family and the religious leaders have expectations for Jesus that are very different than who Jesus really is. People project a lot of their stuff onto Jesus. Are we being encouraged to leave our preconceptions, baggage, and expectations behind, so we can enjoy our journey with Jesus to the other side? How are we to take Jesus, just as he is, with us, just as we are?

Who is Jesus is a central theme throughout Mark. The gospel begins, **“This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” Mark 1:1 NRSV** Toward the end of Mark, Jesus’ caring love has crossed over every barrier, to even the Roman officer who crucified Jesus, for he declares, **“This man truly was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39 NRSV** Our scripture today ends with Mark asking you, personally, who is Jesus?

**“Other boats were with him.”** There were others who experienced God’s caring love, heard Jesus’ call, and joined Jesus in serving the world with love. How are you with Jesus? How do you lovingly serve?

**“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.”** What are the windstorms and waves that are trying to overcome a world of complete love? Perhaps extreme income imbalance, violence against blacks, global warming, the hurtful attitudes behind the confederate flag, hoarding of resources, education, health care and food by a few. What do you think is the greatest wave we battle in partnering with God in establishing heaven on earth?

What are the windstorms and waves that are trying to overcome your personal joy and love? Perhaps an accident, fleeting health, a struggle to forgive, a hostile work environment, a stressful relationship, frustrations, worry, an addiction.

These disciples have answered Jesus' call. They are daily following Jesus and serving with Jesus. Following Jesus does not mean a storm-free existence. The people who did not follow Jesus, who stayed on the shore, are in a safer position.

These disciples are fishermen experienced in navigating through storms. They are navigating the boat, bailing water, using all their experience and expertise to battle the storm. Exhausted, overwhelmed it appears they are about to sink.

**“But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion;”** Who thought to pack a cushion? Someone has fixed a place, so their tired friend can get some rest. Jesus fully human is fatigued from a day of work, so he is sleeping soundly. Jesus, fully God, is resting for he knows that ultimately all will be redeemed and enjoy the glory of eternal life in heaven.

**“And they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’”** They could have shouted, “Wake up, start bailing!” Instead they take the storm personally, inferring that they are in this predicament, because God does not care. Can you relate to the disciples? In the midst of some of your storms have you ever felt that God is asleep, that God is not answering your prayers? In reality God is always with us. God always cares for us. God suffers with us. God cries every tear with us.

**“Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.”** Jesus' ability to control nature reveals that he is God, Creator, and Sustainer. Jesus has the power to end every storm literally and metaphorically. This is a foreshadowing, for Jesus will triumph bringing the Kingdom of God and peace to everyone and the cosmos. Remember Jesus' first words in Mark, **“the Kingdom of God has come near.”** The Kingdom is near but not yet established. We live in the midst of the storm. Some of our nature resists the glory of God's kingdom creating all sorts of storms. There are forces that are resisting the glory of God's Kingdom creating all sorts of storms. It appears we are all perishing, yet all of us will be saved. All of us will physically die, yet we all will be resurrected.

Jesus calms the storm for the disciples but what about the world's storms that are continuing? What about our personal storms that continue? Sometimes I wish I can understand God's timing, God's perspective. There must be a pure, loving, caring reason why God often allows storms to continue.

**“Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’”** Jesus is now calming the storms within the disciples, the storms of fear and no faith. What are your fears? How do you lack faith?

Reconciling the sides, bringing together Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, rich and poor, liberal and conservative, republican and democrat, black and white, Packers and Vikings, gang members and honor students, sweat shop workers and Wall Street workers, terrorists and the peaceful creates waves. Reconciling our sinful nature with a holy God creates internal struggle, longing, striving, fatigue, wave after wave. We are not to be afraid. The storms we face within and without are huge and ominous, swamping our boat. It seems all we have is a teaspoon to bail out the crashing waves. We are to have faith that Jesus is with us. God cares. Your love, our love, is making a difference. The Kingdom of God will be established.

The fear/faith battle is all around us. Many politicians urge us to be afraid of their opponent rather than encouraging faith in working together to find the most excellent way of love for everyone. Many advertisers urge us to be afraid of our appearance, so we need to buy their product rather than encouraging faith that others will see the beauty of our true self. Many news programs flood their broadcast with fear to establish their agenda rather than having faith in the goodness of humanity to overcome every obstacle. Some tell us to be afraid of the other side rather than having faith that a relationship with them will bless everyone. Some tell us to be afraid of sharing rather than have faith that there is plenty for everyone. Some tell us to be afraid of certain lifestyles rather than having faith that God's love is wide enough to enjoy diversity. How are you told to be afraid rather than having faith?

Internally are you afraid to be yourself rather than having faith that others will appreciate you? Are you afraid that your mistakes, failures, sins and shortcomings will last rather than having faith in God's grace to cleanse and perfect you? Are you afraid that a tenuous relationship will break instead of having faith that love will prevail? Are you afraid that your deteriorating physical body will someday be the end of you rather than

having faith that your soul will flourish for eternity? Are you afraid that sorrow will last rather than having faith that eventually your joy will be complete for eternity? What is your inner fear/faith struggle?

**“And they were filled with great awe.”** Jesus calming the storms filled them with great awe. What do you think provided more awe, the calming of the physical storm, the calming of discord between the sides, the calming of fear with faith or the calming of their internal struggle? How does Jesus fill you with awe?

**“They said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”** Who is Jesus? The answer may lie in the questions themselves. Perhaps the awe comes in discovering who Jesus is for you personally rather than being told an answer. Maybe who Jesus is evolves throughout life? Perhaps it is our journey with Jesus, taking Jesus with us just as he, is that provides a limit for our frustration over storms and that diminishes our angst that storms do not end sooner. Perhaps Jesus assures us that God always cares. Who is Jesus to call us to go across to the other side? Who is Jesus to call us to leave behind? Who is Jesus to call us to replace our fear with faith? Who is Jesus to call us to calm storms, to be at peace?

**“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”** Let us take a moment of silence to ponder, who Jesus is. Amen.

*All scripture quotes are from the NRSV translation.*