

Luke 8:22-25
Unflappably Non-Anxious
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Sometimes the daring act of faith is simply to take a nap. You see authentic faith in Jesus Christ is never passive acceptance or a weak resignation that “just believes.” The kind of faith we see in the Gospels is the kind that is courageously confident that Jesus is equal to any occasion that can arise in our lives.

We are making our way through Luke’s Gospel, slowly, taking our time to notice and linger in the subtle and easily overlooked moments of Jesus’ life which also speak directly to our hearts. I’m grateful for my friend Mark Perry who is not only willing to preach God’s Word as Amy and I need to be away these weeks this summer, but also wanted to continue so that we together can continue moving forward in our formation in Christ. Thank you Mark.

So as we come now to the Gospel I invite you as you are able to stand with me

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, ²³and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”

This is one of those moments in the Gospels where Jesus suggests to the disciples, “ok, boys enough talking, time for some walking.” Jesus invites, as the book of James says, to not just be hearers only, but doers of the Word. Jesus invites them to get into the boat. And this is a great metaphor for the moment when faith grows legs, and we start putting it to action.

Being a follower of Jesus means that eventually all of us will be invited to step up and step out. Christianity is never simply a set of religious principles that are applied to our individual lives, to be lived out individually, in a vacuum. It’s also not something we can participate in from the stands, which is what the disciples have done for the last few chapters as they watched him preach a magnificent sermon, then heal a centurion’s servant, raise a widow’s son, and heal a woman with an issue of bleeding. Now it’s time to join the action. And the way Jesus does it is not by asking them for heroic acts, but just to step up and step out.

Earlier this week I was driving in the car with my dad and we were reminiscing about a particular baseball game that we both remember vividly. As a junior in there were three of us from the Junior Varsity team who were pulled up to the big show to join a team full of seniors in the state tournament. And as we made our way through the bracket, winning each of our games, we soon found ourselves in the State Championship game. We also found ourselves without anymore starting pitchers, having used up all the available senior arms.

Dad and I remember that game as my dear friend Jason, someone who—like the rest of us—had spent the entire season on JV with the rest of the juniors, now starting on the mound in the State Championship against Cretin Derim Hall the Catholic Sports Powerhouse from St Paul. Jason went out there and pitched magnificently, giving up only one run, which unfortunately was all they needed.

Parenthetically, my favorite part of the story is dad saying that is that what we didn't realize was that he and Jason's dad sat next to one another that game at the top of the stands far away from the others because they were both so nervous. And they sat there holding hands, literally praying the entire game.

To experience all that God wants for your life you can't merely be an observer. Jesus is always in the business of stretching you. And he does it often by taking you where you don't want to go.

“Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” The side of the lake where Jesus and the disciples were was the west side, where Capernaum, Tiberius, and Nazareth were located. This was home for Jesus during the Galilean part of his ministry. This side is lush with vegetation, green farmland, rolling hills, it's safe there, there are God-fearers on this side. But the other side, the east side, that's a different story. The other side is rocky, craggy, desolate, it's the Jordanian desert, it's Pagan over there, hostile, threatening. The other side is dangerous and unknown.

The other side is wherever it is you don't want to go because you know what you will find there is uncertain, unpredictable, out of your control. The other side is always the place where faith is put to the test. The other side could be a new job, or perhaps the retirement from an old job that has become an anchor and defining aspect to your identity. The other side might be reversing the role and now caring for your aging parents, or it may be grandparents called upon to raise their grandchildren. The other side might be a life of sobriety that has been so far away that it almost feels like a foreign country.

When Jesus wants us to grow up in him, to grow strong in our spiritual muscles, and stretch our capacity for faith, he asks us to get in the boat with him to go to the other side. Never in Amy or I's lives has this been more apparent. If I or if we had the capacity face this challenge we're now facing on our own, we would never get in the boat with Jesus in the first place.

“So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger.” As they pushed off for their journey across the lake, which is only about 3 kilometers, not a long trip, things were calm and peaceful. The Sea of Galilee itself is a few hundred feet below sea level and can be an absolutely serene and peaceful place. But because it is so close to the Mediterranean Sea, and because there are a series of valleys carving a path from the Great Sea to this little one, weather coming off the Mediterranean can rush through the narrows and descend on the Sea of Galilee almost without warning—turning it into a roaring raging tumultuous sea almost in no time.

You can understand how Jesus could fall asleep on the peaceful waters. But sleeping during the torrential windswept waters? Was Jesus just the heaviest sleeper ever, or is there something more here?

Jesus is the unflappably non-anxious presence. Throughout the gospels Jesus refuses time and again to be drawn into others anxiety.

When a crowd of 5,000 gathers and no one thought ahead enough to plan for supper, except a young boy with 5 loaves and 3 fish, the disciples got anxious. How are we going to feed all these people, there's no way, let's just send them home. Jesus calmly says to them: "you feed them."

When Jesus' dear friend Lazarus was lying on his death bed and his sisters Mary and Martha rushed to get Jesus to try and hurry him to save their brother, what does Jesus do? He waits two days longer. Was it that he didn't care? Did he not feel like going? Did he not care? I think it's deeper than that. Jesus always refuses to be drawn into our anxious planning and worrying, he won't be drawn into our despair. He wants to be Lord over our despair, and to teach us faith in the midst of our storms.

I don't know about you but I need this so badly, because right now I can be a bundle of nerves. I'm learning a lot about letting Jesus' calm dictate the tone of my life. I love to be in control and have control, it's my worst quality. And right now, like those disciples, the journey to a challenging place is full of wind and waves, and yet still I try and manage the wind and the waves.

Isn't that a ridiculous image?

In our anxiety we try to bring Jesus into it with us to "give us a little help" in managing our own lives. But Jesus isn't interested in helping us manage our own lives, or in being our co-pilot. The only role Jesus is interested in playing is the one he came to earth to play, Lord of all!

I love this text for many reasons, but one of the most important reasons is that in it we get a glimpse of Jesus full identity. In this story Jesus is fully human (he sleeps in the boat, even during a storm), and fully God (he controls the storm). His sleeping during the storm is not indifference as much as it is his true sovereignty and Lordship over our fears.

When Jesus is finally awoken and he, with a word, calms the storm he asks this penetrating question: where is your faith?

1. He is not saying that if you had faith there would be no storm.
2. He is also not saying that if you had faith you would be able to calm the storm yourself.\

Jesus is inviting us to see his humanity and his deity, his power present in our lives, even when the torrents shake, the tides rise, and the bows feel like they're about to break. Jesus is right there with us in the boat as the God who is unflappably non-anxious presence, or as he's also known, as the Prince of Peace.

There are two stories from this week that illustrated this Jesus with us presence to me. Last Thursday, a few days after Amy's surgery, her friend Alice who lives in Alexandria, came to visit us in the Hospital. And sometimes hospital rooms are tough places to have idle chit-chat. Alice didn't engage in idle chit-chat, instead she simply sat quietly as my wife lie back in the easy chair uncomfortable with pain, and simply rubbed Amy's feet.

She was able to do this because Alice herself has been in the boat with Jesus while the waters raged, and she knew the quiet confidence of faith that allowed her to be the peace of Christ with Amy.

What the church needs is more people who have been in the boat with Jesus. Who have experienced his God/man power, and who have gone deep in their faith, who can then be the unflappably, non-anxious presence in a world that is so full of anxiety and uncertainty.

We had a saying and still do in the church I grew up in and it came out of a raging-sea-like experience. I say “God is good.” You say, “all the time.” I say “all the time” you say “god is good.”

God is good all the time, especially in the storms.