

STORM TRAUMA

Psalm 46; Mark 4:35-41

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May 26, 2019

WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/storm-trauma/>

Some of you will remember another Memorial Day weekend 32 years ago, when this church and community faced trauma. Our church burned down. And though I wasn't your pastor at the time, I've heard the stories. You found God faithful...and sufficient. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..." And then the flood of 1993. This congregation and community also found God faithful and sufficient. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..." On April 30, I underwent prostate cancer surgery. On the day I was discharged from the hospital a tornado ripped across the campus of William Jewell College, where our son and his wife were living in married apartments. It destroyed their home, their cars and a great deal of other property. I was in bed and helpless. I could do nothing. Yet we found God faithful and sufficient. And now the tornado of 2019. We WILL find God faithful and sufficient. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..."

Even though we know of God's faithfulness, I want to speak a very sobering word to remind us that storm trauma does not end when the roads and roofs get rebuilt. There is a lingering shadow that must be named. It is the emotional and spiritual trauma which follows. In September of 2017, two Category 5 hurricanes hit the U.S. Virgin Islands. And just about a month ago, a news story reminded us they are still in pain. Children are particularly vulnerable. One lady shared that her 6-year-old son is pretty much disoriented. Did you hear that? Disoriented. Teachers are seeing frustration in children, cognitive impairment, hopelessness and despair. Counseling has helped. Churches, schools and mental health agencies are working together [NPR, "Morning Edition," April 25, 2019]. We have our work—and our opportunities—cut out for us. Opportunities to see what love can do.

This story in Mark 4 has always grabbed me, but since I last preached it, I visited Israel, was on the Sea of Galilee and had the privilege of presiding at a Lord's Supper service on the boat. It was gray and misty that February morning. But we are told that the cold air can come sweeping down quickly off of the mountains to the north, mix with the warm air from the sea and boom, weather happens! Life happens fast. About a month ago, I wrote in my journal that I felt battered and overwhelmed by all the change around me: deaths, divorce, Wednesday night schedule changes, our move to the gym for worship, people moving away, etc. Nothing seems nailed down. As I wrote, I thought of these two scriptures, Psalm 46 and Mark 4:35ff.

Interesting, Mark begins with the obvious. Jesus was in the boat (v. 36). Hey, we protest. We thought if Jesus is in your boat, nothing can happen to you. No, knowing Jesus does not make us exempt from storms. Verse 37 tells us that they were inundated, overwhelmed. Have you ever felt that way? In over our heads. Where was Jesus when they were hurting? Asleep (v. 38). "Jesus, don't you care that we are perishing?" Sometimes it feels as if God doesn't care. Where is God in the storm?

As I was driving back from Tennessee on Thursday, I kept thinking about Psalm 46:5: “God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning comes.” I kept thinking about how much I love this city and this church. But how much more God loves this city and this church! And isn’t it a curiosity? The noise of the storm didn’t awaken Jesus, but the cry of his children did!

Now here comes my favorite part. Jesus awakened and rebuked the storm (v. 39). Think about how Jesus was raised on scripture, for him, the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). In particular, think how he ingested the psalms. Don’t you imagine he knew Psalm 46 really, really well? Especially Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God...” So Jesus rebukes the storm and says, “Peace! Be still!” Hush! Cease! Stifle yourself!

I love the way Mark ends the story. With three questions: two asked by Jesus—“Why are you afraid?” And, “Have you still no faith?” (v. 40). The opposite of faith is not doubt; it is fear. Richard Rohr has written that the human ego is so stubborn that it never gives up self-control until it has to. Until all the false security is knocked out from under us. The third question is from the disciples. “Who is this?” (v. 41). It’s about awe, wonder and worship.

The greatest truth in our lives is not that we’ve had a tornado move through, that we will have long, hard work to do in economic and mental health recovery. The greatest truth is that Jesus is Lord of the storm. He is above all and yet deeply with us always. Because God is our refuge and strength. Amen.