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Where Is Your Faith? Luke 8.22-25

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He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Josh: What a dramatic ending. The Gospel of Mark started with a dramatic messenger, John the Baptist, pointing toward the Lord. The story ends with an angel pointing toward the Lord.¹

People pointing. That's the definition of messenger, I think. It seems to me, this sermon today is about messengers. So, like Isaiah's soldier messenger with ugly feet, like John the Baptist, like Mark the evangelist, like the angel in the tomb, like our ultimate messenger Jesus Christ, let's all leave here today, pointing. Let's point the world to an ugly scene of a death on a cross. A broken body. Blood running down. A crown of thorns and a sign that mocks the world's definition of "king." An ugly scene perhaps. Yet, we say, "Beautiful."

1. This point was inspired by Morna Hooker's teaching, "Believe and Follow: The Challenge of Mark's Ending," in *Preaching Mark's Unsettling Messiah*, eds. David Fleer and David Bland (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006).



Where Is Your Faith? Luke 8.22–25

CORLEEN PARMELEE

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Oh, what truths to be found in a simple Bible story! How many times have we heard the story of Jesus calming the storm? How many times have we used it in Bible classes or for our children?

The first thing I notice about this story is the use of the wind and the rain. God knows us collectively as a civilization, knows of our strivings to control and organize our world. And yet, in our world of remarkable technology, the winds and the rain remain outside of our control. Those of us who have lived and worked in Malibu for any length of time can identify with the power unleashed in God's creation—the rains and storms that flood the roads, bring down the walls of cliffs, and send the surf surging; the fires that hide the sun and propel the winds and encircle us with flames; the quakes that jar the earth unexpectedly. God's world is not under our control, and our powerlessness helps us keep our perspective regarding both our relationship with God and our stature in comparison to him.

The disciples woke Jesus, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" I wonder what their purpose was in waking him. Were they just informing him, saying "Wake up!" so that he'd be aware he was drowning? Were they just running on adrenaline and letting that excess energy out through their mouths, as we are wont to do? Were they saying, "We're going to drown, do something!"? I've always assumed the last option, that they expected him to save them. But their reaction at the end of the passage, their amazement that even the winds and the water obey him, make me think that perhaps they did not expect to be saved from the storm.

Jesus did not use this opportunity to quiz them on the depth of their faith, to say, "I will do this if you have enough faith." His rebuke was to the wind and the raging waters, and calm was restored. God's faithfulness is not dependent on our faith or loyalty to him.

Calm was restored, and *then* Jesus asked, "Where is your faith?" I have always read that part of this passage as a rebuke; but as I read it in preparation for today, I see the question with new depth. After all, the

passage clearly says he rebuked the wind and the waters. It does not say he rebuked the disciples. And if they did expect him to save them, would it not have been an act of faith for them to wake him, to go to him for help?

“Where is your faith?” There is the question. Is it in the power of the world, in the power of the problems that beset us each day, in the challenges and storms of life to overcome us? “Where is your faith?” God invites us to search for our answer. “Where is your faith?”

Many of us face challenging times in our work. We don’t like some of the things that happen. There are days when many of us have broken or bruised hearts. But the thought that I keep coming back to is that God has always been faithful to me, and I have to expect, with my logical mind, that he will continue to be faithful to me through those difficult times.

When we were first married, Steve and I went to Brazil with the SHARE program, sponsored by the Malibu Church of Christ, as missionary apprentices. We planned to stay for two years, but our visas did not go through as planned, and after about a year, we were given just a few days to leave the country. To get out of the country in time, we had just a day or two to pack up our home, say our goodbyes, and leave. I did not, and still do not, fully understand why all of that happened. It was a stressful time for a young couple, recently graduated, who thought they were following a calling from God.

We have three wonderful sons, who have grown to be men I respect and admire. The women they have chosen to share their lives have been wonderful additions to the family. But I remember the times I worried about them, when one of them decided schoolwork had no place in his life, when another broke one arm and then another during baseball season, when I thought an adult—a teacher or a coach—was treating them unfairly, when I watched their first broken hearts, when they felt betrayed or rejected by a friend or, later, a girl.

My husband began his doctoral work on our twentieth wedding anniversary, in September of 1994, and he graduated in the spring of 2006, nearly twelve years later. Had we known what was coming, I wonder if I ever would have had the courage to begin that journey. I think, overall, it was the hardest thing we have ever done. The scholastic efforts were only a small portion of the cumulative challenge over the years. First of all, our sons were seventeen, fifteen, and nearly fourteen at the time, and they continued to need a father. In addition to his teaching load and his commute to Claremont and his study and preparation time, Steve attended basketball games and volleyball games and stayed involved in the boys’ lives. Physical exhaustion was just part of the program.

For a time, all five family members were higher education students—Steve in his doctoral work, I in a master’s program, and our three sons at Seaver College. Financial strain was fierce. But the harder part of the program, I think, was psychological. In the day of political correctness, everything he was and/or stood for seemed to be the object of ridicule and disdain by those with whom he came in contact. As a straight white male conservative Christian, he seemed to serve as the quintessential “bad guy” for everyone who had ever felt victimized or who had encountered victimization or discrimination in the collected literature of the English-speaking world. Later, of course, his preparation for his comprehensive exams (a list of about 400 books plus the critical works dealing with them) brought huge pressures, followed by researching and writing his dissertation. There were times during that journey when the pressures built and Steve’s body reacted in pain that was hard to diagnose or control. I vividly remember wondering if I was going to lose my husband in the course of this, if his health would be gone forever. And I couldn’t figure it out, because we had thought God was leading us in this direction.

And as I look back on all of these things, I am so very aware that my worries were just that—my own worries. They had nothing at all to do with God’s faithfulness to me. God has been faithful; over and over, in my life. In times of strong faith or wavering faith, he has been faithful to me.

I know that this story is not unique to my life. We know the song, “O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee,” in which the writer beseeches “help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.” One of my favorite verses comes from the hymn “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”: “Drop Thy still dews of quietness, till all our

strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace.”

And so, the question: “Where is your faith?” In the early twenty-first century world of hectic activity, where is your faith? In our academic world of university life, where intellectual pursuits are highly valued, where is your faith? In the constant barrage of world news that seems to emphasize how badly people can treat each other, where is your faith? In the everyday world of raising children and helping aging parents, where is your faith? When the car breaks down, when the taxes are due, when the guy on the freeway cuts you off, where is your faith? God calms the storm and turns to us and says, “Where is your faith?”

Recently, I found a passage in Psalm 73 that has spoken deeply to me in the last few months:

Yet I am always with you;
 you hold me by my right hand.
 You guide me with your counsel,
 and afterward you will take me into glory.
 Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And, having you, there is nothing else on earth that I desire.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart
 and my portion forever (Ps 73.23–26).

But as for me, it is good to be near God.
 I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
 I will tell of all your deeds (Ps 73.6).

I want to encourage all of us to “tell of all his deeds.” Where is your faith? Tell me of his faithfulness in your life. Where is your faith? God calls us to live our lives of faith in Christian community, where we can encourage each other. I am thankful for your stories. I am thankful for the reminders of God’s love for us and for your encouragement when my courage and faith are faltering. I am thankful that God calls us to examine, “Where is your faith?”



At Home in Capernaum

KATIE HAYS

Katie Hays is the preaching minister at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lawrenceville, Georgia. She holds an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School and is currently pursuing her Doctor of Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary. The Revised Common Lectionary pairs Mark 2.1–12 with 2 Corinthians 1.18–22 for the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, on which this sermon was preached in 2006.

I remember the moment I knew youth ministry wasn’t for me. We had taken our youth group camping in the woods of Alabama. At the end of a sweaty game of Capture the Flag, it was time for “tick check.” We got the girls in one tent and the boys in another and supervised the checking of each adolescent body for those nasty little creatures. I thought, “I went to graduate school for this?”

But on that same trip, one of the kids gave me a beautiful gift I will never forget. We had been fishing earlier in the day, and my husband had actually caught a nice-sized fish. While we assumed we would throw it back, one of our kids wouldn’t hear of it. He wanted to cook that fish. He had a knife and a stove back at the tent site and wanted permission to go get it.

He and I walked a quarter-mile or so to get his gear. I barely knew him and figured that while we walked