



LOOKS LIKE WE'RE IN FOR STORMY WEATHER
Mark 4:35-41

The moving and inspiring story just read from Mark's gospel happened to some of you **yesterday** – some of you are going through it **now** – for some of you it will happen **tomorrow**. It is a story, which declares that no one will go unscathed or unscarred in life's journey – not even God's son Jesus Christ.

It is the story of a boat ride across the Lake of Galilee – and a whole lot more. As Paul Harvey would say “**And now for the rest of the story.**”

The disciples and Jesus were in one boat – and from **verse 36** it hints that there were other boats filled with people as well. Since many of the first disciples were fishermen and many others earned their living this way – it is not unusual to have more than one boat out on the waters.

The disciples being fishermen were probably swapping fish stories with each other – friendly chatter so to speak. This was a time to relax. Jesus had done a great deal of teaching and traveling – so he was exhausted and goes to sleep.

The next thing we know **verse 37** simply shares, “A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.”¹ Eugene Peterson says, “A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it.”² Yes, that little part of the world they knew was suddenly and strongly tossed and turned – and they were struggling.

This powerful story is saying to us in the 21st century that life is like a boat ride – and we are the passengers. Life can be like a peaceful sea or lake that – without warning – can become turbulent and troublesome.

To make the circumstances even more challenging – the storm comes at night when all is dark. How do you react when it is dark? As a pastor – I have never gotten used to calls at midnight or 3:00 a.m.

Yes, our national life – our family's life – our health can flare like a storm out of nowhere. One moment all is fine – the next moment we are struggling – staggering searching for some sanctuary from the storm. When the storms do come at us from seemingly all directions – it is then we need direction and a north star to guide us. Storms have a way of unraveling for awhile – so we need to gather faith and strength so

we are able to sing the songs of victory – even at midnight – and keep whistling in the dark because we know a sovereign God is at work in the universe. We need a solid rock to stand on.

Let us keep the mental image of the storm in front of us – and let the story unfold in all its truth and insight today. Without further chitchat let us dig in as I have four insights to share for your consideration today.

FIRST WE LEARN THAT STORMS COME TO EVERYONE.

Dr. M. Scott Peck began his best-selling book, **THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**, with three words: “Life is difficult.” Healthy people do not deny the storms of life – they seek the strength and wisdom to move through the storms until – as Eugene Peterson says: “**The wind runs out of breath.**”³

In the Gardiner Museum in Boston there is a splendid painting by Rembrandt. It is a painting based on the biblical story that we are studying today.

If you look closely – you can see that Rembrandt actually painted himself in the boat with those disciples. No one is exempt. Rembrandt knew he was a spiritual stand-in for all.

Let us now turn to that passage in **Matthew 7:24-27** I asked you to earmark. Jesus has just given the disciples the insights of the Sermon on the Mount – which is in my opinion their ordination sermon or charge. So by the time we encounter this story in Mark’s gospel they already have heard this teaching and instruction.

It is one thing to preach a sermon – it is another thing to live it. It is one thing to listen to sermons – to soak them up – it is another thing to put them into practice.

When you look at the two characters in this story – you see they have so much in common. These two individuals represent our church – our family – our neighborhoods – our world. They represent believers – and non-believers. Jesus is saying, “Looks like we’re in for stormy weather,” or “a bad moon is rising.”

- They both build a house
- They both select a foundation of their own choosing.
- They both hear the instructions and act upon those instructions.
- Jesus recognizes both houses – but does not rank them yet.
- They both face a horrendous storm. No one is exempt.
- Perhaps the houses even look identical on the outside.
- Perhaps the houses were built in the same area. Even the seashore has sandy soil and sturdy soil.
- However one was declared wise – which is a **tremendous compliment** - and one was declared a fool – which was the most **degrading comment** you could say about a person.

There was one major difference in the way these houses were constructed. One house was built upon the sand (the easier way) – and the other house was built upon bedrock (the more difficult and time-consuming way). No short cuts. Both knew how to build – they just chose different approaches. One builder dug down **beyond** the sandy soil - to a sturdy foundation below. The difference in the homes could not be seen easily by the human eye. Only a wise builder could see the difference.

It was the storms of life that come to everyone that exposed the weakness of a nice appearance – but a faulty foundation. It is far better to have a strong foundation – and a more modest appearance than the other way around. That is not ‘preacher talk’ – but the gospel truth.

SECONDLY, STORMS OFTEN REVEAL WHAT FOUNDATION WE HAVE ACTUALLY BUILT OUR LIVES UPON.

Only faith in a worthy object can see us through the winds and waves. Fear is a very powerful human emotion. It has the ability to cripple and paralyze the human spirit and soul in a way none other can do. The power of fear fills the offices of physicians, psychologists, and pastors – and rightly so. That is why this story will never be outdated or irrelevant.

Jesus knew that nothing would be more detrimental to his disciples – his students – than the crippling power of fear. It is easy for God’s people to have big egos and little faith. After this boat ride they learned it is far better to have small egos and strong faith.

A number of years ago, Jim Kaat – a star pitcher for the Minnesota Twins baseball team – was asked by a sports writer what it meant to be a Christian and a professional athlete. He answered by relating an experience that has taken place on the pitcher’s mound recently. The Twins needed to win the last game of the season. Win it – go to the playoffs. Lose it – go home for the season. It was the top of the ninth inning. Bases were loaded – two outs, the count on the batter in the box – 3 balls – 2 strikes. As he prepared to throw the next pitch he stated he was glad that **“my eternal destiny was not riding on that next pitch.”** Knowing this – allowed him to live life to its fullest and with confidence.⁴ Yes – our destiny and salvation is secure because God does the holding. This leads me to our third consideration.

WHEN YOU ARE IN NEED OF HELP – ASK FOR IT.

The great danger for any human being is to think we are self-made men and women – and to think we actually can pilot the ship on our own insights and power.

So many of you have shared with me that it was during a storm in your life that your faith became real. You were compelled to move from a cold storage type of religion – to a vital living relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith is no longer a theory and second-hand experience – only the real thing will do.

It is in **verse 38** that the disciples reach a point of spiritual desperation – and they cry out for help. This is usually the first step in our salvation – and in our growth as a disciple. Anne Lamott, at least once a day, prays “**Help me – Help me – Help me!**”

Notice in the early part of **verse 38** that the disciples are just a little ticked off that Jesus is sleeping on the job. I want to offer two insights about this.

The poet laureate G. K. Chesterton once wrote: Sleep is one of the surest signs of trust in God. This kind of sleep is not connected to sloth – but to faithful service.

A rancher with a very large ranch to run - ran an ad for a foreman to assist him in the responsibility of running the large operation. The owner asked the applicant, “What skills do you have in running a ranch?” The man said “**I can sleep when the winds blow.**” About a month later a storm came up one night – and the rancher awoke to check the ranch. However – all was well. The foreman had done all the tasks and jobs required – and he was fast asleep in the bunkhouse. That is one thing.

Secondly, if Jesus seems to be sleeping and unconcerned perhaps it is because we have not used the tools of scripture – worship – Christian fellowship and prayer. If Jesus seems silent maybe – just maybe – he is waiting for you to wake him up – and invite him into the storm with you. **Help me! Help me! Help me!**

There is a reason we come to worship week after week. There is a good reason we study and learn from the word of God. We come because “we must exchange and bury the gods we have made before the Living God who made us.”⁵

LASTLY – DO YOU HAVE A STORM HOME WHERE YOU WEATHER THE STORM?

So far we have learned that our Lord Jesus does not promise that the winds will always be in our favor – but the grip of his hand and power will last longer than any storm.

It is this hand that keeps us moving and working and burning the midnight oil to do the work that God has called us to do – until he comes again or calls us home.

When my wife Mary was growing up in Britton, South Dakota, they often experienced harsh winters filled with heavy snows and even more dangerous land blizzards. Often the students who lived on farms outside the town were assigned a family in town where they would stay when the buses could not make the return trip because of the blizzards. These homes were called ‘**storm homes.**’

Heavy snows and blizzards are not the only elements in life that force us to seek and locate a refuge or safe place. The elements of divorce, alienation, unemployment, drugs, alcohol, and health problems can create great chaos in our lives. It is then we discover the value of having a storm home – a refuge – a sanctuary to hold us up.

There are people in this chapel today who have been through some difficult storms. The very fact you are here today is a testimony that your faith is real – and that there is a power and presence here that allows us to get over to the other side. I believe the Bible teaches us that the church is to be a storm home.

Yes, Jesus, it shares in **verse 39**, got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!”⁶ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. As Mr. Peterson shares: “The wind ran out of breath – the sea became smooth as glass.”⁷

The disciples - like many of us when we are rescued at sea – are in absolute awe! Staggered!⁸ Our lesson clearly reveals:

**Before the storm
During the storm
After the storm**

That Jesus Christ is Lord and Captain in the well-fought fight! The next time you face a storm – don’t worry - tell the storm how big and great the Lord God of the universe is.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz

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ENDNOTES

¹ NIV, Mark 4:37.

² Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language**, Mark 4:37, NavPress: 2002, page 1816.

³ Peterson, page 1816.

⁴ **“The Daily Bread Devotional,”** Nov. 4, 2001, selection.

⁵ This phrase is attributed to the late Dr. Paul Scherer, a distinguished Lutheran pastor in New York City.

⁶ NIV, Mark 4:39.

⁷ Peterson, page 1816.

⁸ Peterson, page 1816.