

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 5

Galilee: "Jesus Stills a Storm" Mark 4:35-5:43

Commentary: "If...."

In many ways the Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of "if..."; *"If you choose, you can make me clean"; "if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."; "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."*

"If" is a complicated word. Typically, "if" is a conditional clause or supposition, implying the result or effect of something that may – or may not – happen, or be true; it's not a conclusive, decisive, or authoritative word. Used this way, unconsciously, "if" is the dog-whistle of doubt/fear. But "if" – when used honestly, hopefully – can also be an expression of desperate, honest, unencumbered, faith. This is the "if" of Mark's Gospel: it is uttered by people so desperate in their situation, so honest about their fears and doubts – even about Jesus' ability to help, and so blunt and straightforward in their plight and plea that their faith not only moved them to go to great lengths to reach Jesus, but also moved Jesus to respond.

And, how does Jesus respond? Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus does not respond to their predicament – the presenting issue that preoccupied their every thought and hour – but, instead, He recognized their faith – their 'foxhole faith' that moved them to cling to their hope, despite the odds, possible rejection, ridicule, to take their fears, doubts, AND hope to Jesus. The author of Mark is telling his readers that, no matter who they are, what situation they are in, whatever they have done; "if" they take their hope and faith to Jesus, He will bless them both physically and spiritually.

This, then, begs the question: why, if the disciples were followers of Jesus, wouldn't they do this during the storm on the Sea of Galilee?

This brings us to the other theme of our reading – that of "fear" and "faith": fear with faith, and fear without faith. The three people who came to Jesus to be healed – or to have their plea/prayer answered – came to Jesus, despite being socially, politically, even spiritually outside of those who were considered acceptable, out of fear BUT with faith. They had no right to ask Jesus to help them – or even realistic expectations that He would; but they came non-the-less with nothing but hope and faith. The disciples, on the other hand, when caught in a sudden tempest on the Sea of Galilee, gave into their fear and, by doing this, when they did go to Jesus, it was without faith.

"Storm on the Sea of Galilee"



(Rembrandt van Rijn, 1633)

What was the worst 'storm' or 'crisis' that you've ever been through? We've all had them, what was yours? How did you react? It's natural to be afraid – we're human after all (naked, afraid, and hiding in the Garden – remember?) – but, even in the midst of the cacophony of the moment (be-it hospital machines, police or fire sirens, thunder and wind, the cries of a loved one in pain or hunger), which side of the equation did you come down on: fear with faith? Or fear without faith?

One last thing about these encounters: nobody left the experience the same as they were before it happened. It is clear from the reactions of the disciples and those of the townspeople and pig herders – as well as the crowd surrounding Jesus during His encounter with both the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus, and the miracle of his daughter's resurrection – without being surprised by the extent of Jesus' power. Not surprisingly, those who came to Jesus with faith were awed and moved to respond with praise and gratitude, while those who came without faith responded with suspicion and worry. The question is: If you were witness to Jesus' actions during these stories – after all that you had seen; how would you respond to this Jesus – the One who reigns over chaos, disorder, even death? Would you choose fear or faith?