

Let Us Go

Mark 4:35-41
Matt Matthews

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL
June 20, 2021

Gospel Mark 4:35-41 ³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, *“Let us go across to the other side.”* ³⁶And *leaving the crowd behind*, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

When Jesus utters the words, “Let us go across to the other side” he underscores a theme of Mark’s gospel: The story of Jesus is more often than not the story of Jesus on the move.

He has just finished telling a series of parables on the seashore, and now, he gazes beyond the Sea of Galilee and tells his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side.” Jesus in Mark’s Gospel is never content just to sit around. He is a man of purpose. And his purpose is telling people that the kingdom of God has come near. It’s Good News, and Jesus always, always, always wants to share it.

He’s a man always on the move. So, he wants to share Good News on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He wants to share Good News with people in Urbana, to the Upstate and the down, to the rich folk, the working class, the white folk, and the brown. There’s always more for Jesus to do, always more people for Jesus to meet, more households to visit, more towns to explore, more lakeshores to tell stories from, more places of worship to praise God in.

I’ll borrow words from Halford Luccock, writing from Yale Divinity in the 1950’s about this text. He writes of the appeal the open road has upon Jesus. “The lure of the horizon was always before him... His eyes were raised to the fields white unto harvest. He was always conscious of ‘other sheep’.” Luccock describes Jesus’ movement as an *impelling urge*. “Let us go,” Jesus says. “Let us go across to the other side.”

Jesus is always on the move, immediately from this scene, immediately to the next scene. Scene crashing into scene. Loving. Teaching. Healing. Listening. Walking with. Encouraging. Standing up for others. Speaking up for others. Always, always, always sharing Good News. Our church gets our mission from this constant yearning: We try to love God more. Love people more. And love more people. No doubt, the Corbin family understands this yearning.

“A penetrating question for us, as individual disciples and as a church, is this: Have we kept the lure which the horizon had for Jesus? Do the three little words **‘let us go’** still sound commandingly in our hearts and minds, or has a paralysis of inertia set in?”^[1]

It’s a great question. Luccock wrote about it 70 years ago. But the question is as old as time. Are we content to be inactive or on-hold in our faith, or are we eager to put our faith into action? Do we feel a renewed energy to share our love, to share the fellowship of Jesus with others, to widen our circle of friends, to reach our hands out to others?

Are we willing to get into the boat and go across to the other side? Are we willing to risk the comforts of home and status quo? Are we willing to keep serving, keep loving, keep learning? If we are not,

Jesus will not be deterred. He is on the move. His faith—and the faith to which he calls us to emulate—is one of risking, listening, growing, moving, morphing, reaching. In short, we are called to have and live an active faith.

Truth be told, when Jesus says ‘let us go,’ sometimes I don’t want to go. Sometimes I’m not ready to go. Sometimes I’m too comfortable to get up and go. I’m content to stay put. Sometimes I, frankly, don’t want to be bothered. I’d rather do something else, or, worse, I’m not interested in serving like Jesus served. I don’t want to love like Jesus loved. And I don’t want to love the people Jesus loved. He can love them, but I don’t have to. That my choice. Sadly, sometimes I choose not to love. I can be apathetic about the faith, and I can reject the faith. I’m not eager or willing to keep up with Jesus.

The fact that Jesus wants me to come with him, however, melts my heart. He wants me. ME! YOU! US! TOGETHER! “Let us go! Get in the boat! Let us go across to the other side.”

That invitation is compelling. And the deepest part of me wants to follow.

But still, something still, still, still sometimes holds me back, and it is this: Sometimes I’m too afraid. Sometimes I fear I may lose my way. Sometimes I fear I won’t be able to keep up. Sometimes I fear I won’t be good enough. Sometimes I fear I will fail. Sometimes I fear I will embarrass myself. Sometimes I fear I will hurt the effort, that I might mess up God’s good work, that I’ll get the message wrong, that I hamper Jesus instead of helping him.

Do you ever feel that way? Are you sometimes afraid to follow? Afraid to say yes to God’s voice to serve, to reach, to love, to—get into the boat?

* * *

Jesus and his friends got into the boat. They set out for the other side. And that storm whipped up. The boat was tossed. The disciples were afraid. When they woke up Jesus and he calmed the storm, he asked them two difficult questions: (1) Why are you afraid? (2) Have you still no faith?

He is suggesting that, ultimately, we have nothing to worry about because Jesus’ power reminds us that God’s love has power over all things—all winds, all waves, all life, even death. We can trust that. We can believe it. And we can let that truth calm us.

Sometimes, I have to admit, that I don’t have faith in God like that. It is those times I need to remember that while I can’t grasp God, God always grasps me. And God’s grip doesn’t fail. God’s hands are so big, nobody can fall out.

* * *

The collision of this news blurb and this story speaks directly to my apathy, my lack of faith, and all the other reasons I sometimes use NOT to follow Jesus. This speaks especially to my fear.

The news blurb is this: In southern Brazil, they’re building a new statue of Jesus called *Christ the Protector*. It is 16 feet taller than the famous *Christ the Redeemer* in Rio de Janeiro. At 141 feet this new colossus will be the third-largest statue of Jesus in the world.

The story is this: A little school boy got head lice at school. Many of kids did. The father took his boy to a nearby hair salon that specialized in nit-picking lice. He, the dad, gestured to his bald head and told the receptionist, “I hope I don’t have them too.” It was a bad joke.

The receptionist said, “Don’t worry. Dads *never* get lice. Moms do.” He pointed toward a few women, sitting patiently as the nitpickers did their work.

The father didn't understand. "Why not dads?"

The receptionist said, "Moms get down on the floor to play, or the kids get in their laps to cuddle. Their heads touch. The lice climb in."^[2]

This story speaks poorly of fathers, and most modern fathers don't fit that description, I don't think. But this story moves me: the idea that moms and dads play with, and cuddle, are close to, and openly love their children speaks to me of God's love.

I don't need a concrete Jesus. I need a Jesus who is willing to walk closely, closely by my side. I need a Jesus who is in the boat with me, close enough to hear my fears, powerful enough to calm my fears, gentle enough to make the passage through my fears with me, by my side.

Thanks be to God that the one who says, "Let us go! Get in the boat! Let us go across to the other side" is willing to be in the boat with us. He doesn't stand like some concrete Jesus frozen on the shore gazing over our heads, but is right beside us looking us in the eye when the storms come and when the storms go. The journey with Jesus is exciting, sometimes dangerous, fulfilling, glorious.

Let us go. Get in the boat!

Let us go across to the other side.

AMEN.

^[1] See Luccock masterful observations in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Abington/Cokesbury Press, Nashville, New York, 1951, p 709, vol. 7.

^[2] Matt Fitzgerald, blogging for the Christian Century, June 14, 2021, captured June 16 2021: https://www.christiancentury.org/article/reflection/karl-barth-s-wisdom-fathers-and-mothers-and-all-children-god?utm_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm_campaign=65272761c8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_EdPicks_2021_6_8_syncretism_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b00cd618da-65272761c8-86276556