

Sunday, November 5, 2017
Shocked and Awed.
Mark 4: 35-41
St. Giles' Presbyterian Church

Over the last eight months, I've had the privilege to lead the Men's Ministry group here at St. Giles'. It's something that we started back in February and at this point, we've had seven guys from the church come out. On average, we meet about twice a month and that can change depending on our schedules. Starting in September, we've started a DVD Bible Study called the "Gospel in Life" that is written and prepared by Timothy Keller. Tim Keller was the lead the pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and recently stepped down in July so that he could concentrate on training the next generation of leaders through an organization he started called Redeemer City to City.

In our study a few weeks ago, our conversation focused on our own Christian Faith and journey. And in that conversation, I shared a little bit about my faith journey.

Some of you might know that I grew up in the Presbyterian Church. My home church is at Markham Chinese Presbyterian Church, in Markham, Ontario.

Some of you might also know that I spent my Elementary School years attending People's Christian Academy that was founded by the People's Church, one of Toronto's Mega Churches.

But I'm sure most of you don't know that it took a long time for me to really take my faith seriously. In fact, it wasn't until I was in University that my faith became more and important to me.

Thinking back to my days at York University, I remember at one point really asking myself about this Christianity thing. Did I really believe it? If I didn't, then coming to church and going to all the different fellowship groups and church activities was a big waste of time.

But, if I DID believe it, then I'd better find out more about who Jesus is. And so I did this. I began to live my life questioning everything that was going on in my faith.

Asking questions is a big part of figuring out Christianity. And when we read through the scriptures, taking this kind of position is no different. And that's why when we read the Gospels, it is good for us to really try and figure out what the authors are trying to tell us.

The purpose of the Gospel of Mark is to give an eyewitness account of who Jesus is. And when the author of the Gospel of Mark tells of his account, his purpose is to give us a clear picture of who Jesus is so that WE can make our own decisions.

This is important for us to understand. In the scriptures from Mark chapter 4:35-41, we read about a seemingly unbelievable account of Jesus calming the storm. But

what's also important here is the dialogue and exchange that Jesus has with his disciples. This morning I'd like to focus on this conversation.

Remember how we began this morning with the attitude of "Question Everything?" In our passage, we see that there is a series of 4 questions that are asked, nearly in succession. Those four questions are:

[SLIDE]

- (1) Teacher, don't you care if we drown? – The Disciples
- (2) Why are so afraid? Do you still have no faith? – Jesus
- (3) Who is this? – The Disciples

This morning, we'll unpack these four questions and my hope is that it will provide a clearer understanding for us who Jesus is.

For those of you who are new to the Christian journey of faith, my hope is that this will help you get to know our Lord and Saviour on a deeper level. For those of you have been on the Christian journey of faith for a longer period of time, my hope is that this will help deepen our faith in Christ.

But before we begin, let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

We thank you for this day. We thank you that we can gather as a community together and worship you. We thank you for your scriptures and for the book of Mark. Holy Spirit, come and teach us. Open the eyes of our hearts, so that we might come understand what you've done for us on the cross. Transform our lives so that we might be more like you. Help us to practice our Faith in the light of your love, mercy and grace.

For this we ask in your name.

Amen.

This past summer, my family and I were deciding where to go on our family vacation. Since it we are celebrating Canada's 150th birthday, we had suggested that perhaps we might go and visit Ottawa. Another idea that came up was that we would go and drive out to Prince Rupert and then go and visit Haida Gwaii. But ultimately, we decided to make use of the Canada's 150th Park's Pass.

And so our itinerary was to drive from Prince George and visit Jasper. After going to Jasper, we went to visit friends in both Edmonton and Calgary. On Canada Day, we flew from Calgary to Vancouver so that we could visit family and friends there. After our visit in Vancouver, we decided that it was easiest for Alli and Alyx fly back to Prince George from Vancouver and that I would fly to Calgary to pick up the car and drive alone from Calgary back to Prince George.

Before going on that final drive from Calgary to Prince George, we had heard that forest fires had started in the interior of British Columbia. And having moved to Prince George three years ago, forest fires seemed to have become part of the ebb and flow of life, living in the north.

For me, I remember saying to myself, “Forest fires? How bad could it be?” Of course, we all know how big those forest fires were this past summer. The government of British Columbia produces statistics for wild fires after every summer. And although those final numbers haven’t been published yet, we know that at least a million hectares have been burned and that the province has spent at least \$315 million dollars on fighting those fires.

We live in the north and WE KNOW how devastating and how powerful nature can be.

When we dive into the scriptures in Mark chapter 4, we get a similar idea of this fact. In our passage this morning, we find that Jesus and the disciples are in the thick of ministry and are teaching and preaching to the crowds of people that have come. In the evening, Jesus tells his disciples that they were leaving the crowds and that they would take a boat to the other side.

[Sea of Galilee Aerial – slide]

What we have to understand about this situation is that Jesus and the disciples have been teaching the crowds near the Sea of Galilee. And for our modern ears, this may seem like a simple fact. But what we have to understand about the Sea of Galilee is that it is 166 square km in surface area and it measures 53 km all around or 53 kms in circumference. The other thing that is of note is that it is the second lowest lake in the world next to the Dead Sea. And it is found at the basin of the mountains and this makes it highly susceptible to sudden and violent storms.

Knowing all of this about the Sea of Galilee is important for us. In our passage this morning, the scriptures say a furious storm show up out of nowhere.

And, in that storm, we find that it is SO VIOLENT that the waves and the water are breaking over the boat and we're told that the boat is "nearly swamped". Now don't forget that a lot of the disciples were also fishermen by trade, and so for them, being in a boat in a storm shouldn't be that big of a deal. Thinking back to this past summer about the forest fires, the one memory that sticks is when I said, "how bad could it be?"

For the disciples seeing this storm AND panicking, WE KNOW that this storm was a big deal.

And so the disciples are in a panic and who do they turn to? They turn to Jesus and they ask that very first question:

[SLIDE]

“Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Mark 4: 38

Question 1 – Teacher, don’t you care?

This first question is an interesting one for us because it is packed with FEAR. The disciples are scared for their lives and they are INDIGNANT that Jesus would be sleeping at a time like this. Remember, for the book of Mark, up until this point, the disciples have never seen Jesus perform a “nature miracle”. They had seen Jesus perform miracles of healing, but they had never witnessed for themselves the extent of Jesus’ power.

And so they find Jesus and they wake him up and they ask him very pointedly, Teacher, don’t you care?

How many times have we asked someone that question? Maybe you’re at home and you’re left to clean up a huge mess that’s been left behind. You look at your spouse who’s sitting and watching TV and you say, “Don’t you care about the house? Why don’t you help?”

Or maybe you’ve been in a situation where you’ve lost your keys. You’re looking all over the house because you’re late for a meeting and nobody else

in the house is helping you. You look up and you ask, “Doesn’t anyone care?
I’m late for work!”

Or maybe you’ve been in a crisis situation where you’ve lost a loved
one. You’re sitting all alone and you ask yourself, “Doesn’t anyone
care?”

When we read the gospels and we read the disciples who were getting to know Jesus
more and more every day, we see that even though they were sharing and doing life
with our Lord Jesus – they too ask the same question.

And in their situation, where their world is literally collapsing around them,
they ask Jesus in that very pointed, indignant, and some scholars say,
rude tone, Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?

Jesus’ Response – The Power

And what does the scriptures say about Jesus when the disciples wake him up and
ask him whether or not he cares? We’re told that Jesus gets up and he goes and
REBUKES the wind and says

[SLIDE]

“Quiet! Be Still! Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” – Mark 4:

39-40

This has got to be one of the most powerful verses in the gospel. And by powerful I mean both literally and figuratively. It is literally one of the most powerful verses because we see that Jesus, in one simple sentence calms the storm.

And at first glance, it's so easy for us to gloss over such a fact. But when we really sit down and reflect AND wrestle over this verse, we see that it's not so easy to just ignore it.

First off, you might think of this verse is like a fishermen telling you how big a fish they caught. There's an element of exaggeration that's there. I'll give you an example:

A few years ago, Alli and I were visiting her uncle and aunt in Kelowna. We were at the mall, walking back to the car. All of a sudden, I feel this piercing pain in my foot. I look down and realize that a rusty nail has gone through my flip-flop and there's blood coming out of my foot. We go to the walk in clinic and ask that I get a tetanus shot. We're sitting in clinic and the doctor asks for the story and I tell him what happened. The doctor then asks me how big the nail was and I say

THE NAIL WAS THIS BIG! It was huge!

He laughs and turns to Alli and she says well, the nail was actually this big and probably went into his foot about 1 cm. I mean, to this day, I think Alli was wrong.

But whenever we tell the story it's definitely a story of exaggeration

or maybe it's a story of minimization... On Alli's part 😊

[Back to the Gospel of Mark]

But this is just it when we read the gospel of Mark. Either we read this passage a fairy tale or a story of exaggeration

OR we read this passage as truth. Jesus really did say to the wind and the waves, QUIET! BE STILL! And really the water on the lake becomes completely calm.

In this one simple sentence of calming the storm, Mark reveals to his reader who Jesus really is. Jesus is much more than just a miracle man or a great doctor. He is much more than someone who heals a person of his or her physical ailments.

Jesus has POWER over nature.

He has POWER over the storm.

And he has POWER over creation.

This is VITALLY important for us to wrap our minds around.

Often times we say things like, Jesus is Lord.

Sometimes in our spiritual journey, we'll say that Jesus is our friend.

In church, we'll address Jesus as the Son of God.

All of these things are true!

Don't get me wrong. But when we're confronted with this "miracle of nature", we are all challenged with this one fact. Jesus is also the Lord over all of creation. He is God. He is the one that created the Heavens and the Earth. Jesus is in control of ALL things.

Question 2 - Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?

Jesus being in control of all things brings us to our second series of questions that is posed by Jesus himself.

[SLIDE] "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" – Mark 4:40

These two questions by Jesus reveal to us the state of mind of the disciples AND Jesus' expectations for them. On the one hand, we really see how scared and afraid the disciples were in that moment.

In that moment where the storm and the waves were breaking over the boat, we see that the disciples fall back into default mode. In their experience up until now they knew as fishermen that this was not a good situation to be in. The boat was taking in water and they knew that they were in a world of trouble. Their worldview up until that point was that they were only a few minutes away from drowning.

Yet, over the last little while, they had met Jesus. Their worldview was beginning to change. They had met a great teacher who had an understanding of the scriptures that was like no other. They had experienced life together with Jesus and had witnessed him perform miracle after miracle. People were being freed from their afflictions and they were being healed and made whole again.

But in that one moment of panic, this new worldview had disappeared, (snap) just like that.

And so Jesus challenges them by asking. Do you still have no faith?

It's like Jesus was asking them,

with all the things that we've been through so far,

with all the things that I've been showing you,

Don't you trust me? Don't you have faith?

Or in other words, Jesus was hoping that their faith was becoming more mature.

Walter Wessel puts it like this:

[SLIDE] “Faith” here means faith in God’s saving power as it is present and active in the person of Jesus. – Walter Wessel

Jesus had expected that the disciples’ faith would be demonstrated in a deeper way, especially when their life depended on it.

How many times have we been confronted with this same kind of situation? How is our faith? Are we still afraid? Can we truly respond and say that our faith in Jesus is maturing every day? Or is our response to Jesus when the going gets tough is “Jesus, don’t you care?”

In the journey of faith, if we were given a road map, we could plot it out and say, ok I want to get “THERE” – I want to become a mature Christian. I want to have faith in Christ. I cognitively know that HE is in control of EVERYTHING – including the storm. Including the wind and the waves. He is in control of every situation. Lord, help me to grow and mature in my faith. Help me to get from “HERE” to “THERE”.

The key thing that we have to understand about Faith is that it is not something that we can acquire or buy or earn. Faith is a gift. Faith is something that is given to us by God.

In the storm. When we're faced with difficult situations. Do we go back to our default mode of panic and fear, or have we been gifted with faith?

That is something that we all need to stop and think about and reflect.

But the good thing is this. Faith is something that we can ask for. We find this in the scriptures as well. In Mark chapter 9, Jesus heals a boy that is possessed by a Spirit. In that passage we see that the boy's Father is confronted with this very thing of faith. And he says, "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

Faith is a gift and it is something that we can ask for. Ask God today to help with your unbelief.

Question 3 - Who is this? Shock and Awe.

As we continue in the scriptures, we come to our third question that we find in the passage of Mark chapter 4. The disciples pose the third question and they ask

[SLIDE] "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" - Mark 4: 41

Imagine this. You're one of the disciples and you've just been a part of one of the most violent storms in your life AND you've just witnessed Jesus speak one sentence and all of the waters now before you are calm. And the question Jesus then asks you

Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?

How would you feel? Would you feel awkward? Would you feel embarrassed?

Or, would you feel completely and utterly afraid. Maybe the word "afraid" isn't the right word to use here. But maybe a better phrase to use here is being SHOCKED and AWED.

Think about it. You have just been confronted with one of the most fantastic things here. The teacher that you have been asked to follow has showed his POWER. And so for the disciples, the response really is that they're shocked and awed at his greatness.

The question, "Who is this?" is an important question to ask when it comes to our own faith and spiritual journey. To be shocked into asking this kind of question doesn't happen that often. But when we begin to find out the kind of person that we've just seen or we've just been witness to is amazing.

It's kind of like this. When I was a teenager I was hanging out with some friends. And, I don't remember exactly why we were there, but we were in Hamilton Ontario on a Sunday afternoon. We were out and about and I remember that we were visiting one of the local markets in Hamilton.

Phil was like a big brother to me and I remember as we were walking in this market, Phil suddenly walks over to this man and introduces himself. He says hi Tim! And proceeds to have a short conversation with him.

Now of course I had no idea who he was but after "Tim" left, I had to ask. Who was that guy? It turns out that the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Vancouver Canucks and just played a preseason game in Hamilton the night before. And the Tim that we met was Tim Hunter of the Vancouver Canucks! Now being a teenager, I was in awe. We had just met a real life NHL player, out and about on a regular Sunday afternoon. How awesome was that!

When I think about it, how MUCH MORE in awe must the disciples have been when they saw what Jesus had just done with calming the storm!

Conclusion

I love how Mark ends this chapter of his gospel. There's no explanation. There are no further details to this encounter. The chapter ends with the disciples being Shocked and Awed with what they have just witnessed.

And I believe Mark does this on purpose. Mark leaves this chapter like a cliff-hanger for his reader. And he's saying. Ok, I've just told you one of the most UNBELIEVABLE things about Jesus.

Do you believe who he is?

The disciples, even though they witnessed this miracle of nature, FIRST HAND, and with their OWN EYES, they don't understand it. But we know as we continue to read this passage that they believe. Why else would they continue to follow Jesus?

Now of course the disciples still make mistakes. They still have times where Jesus is continuing to teach them. But witnessing first hand that Jesus has the POWER, even over nature becomes built into THEIR lives and THEIR faith journeys as well.

The other thing about witnessing this kind of power from Jesus is this. Is that even though Jesus is able to control this kind of power, we as humans cannot. This is a very sobering thought, especially in our modern day society.

Often times we think that we are in control of our lives and our own destiny. But when we are faced with the kind of power that we see in nature, very quickly we realize how small and powerless we really are.

Going back to the forest fires this past summer, I remember that my family and I listened to the radio carefully and read as many news articles and watched as many news clips as we could. There was a time in the summer where we were confronted with the real possibility that Prince George could be evacuated as well. And really, what could we do? The only thing that we COULD do was to be ready and prepared if need be, we too would be evacuated and we would have to move at a moment's notice. We were all confronted with the unimaginable POWER of the forest fire

When the disciples are confronted with unimaginable power of Jesus controlling the storm, they too were faced with their own dilemma. How were they to receive, understand and act with knowing that Jesus had this kind of control and THIS kind of power?

The disciples, I believe would have had to take time to reflect, talk and unpack what they had just seen. But this kind of experience can only make you respond in one of two ways.

The first response is to walk away, completely frightened at the prospect of having to deal with this kind of powerful man. If Jesus had this kind of power and if he wanted to, one false step would mean the end of life.

The second response is to be ALL IN with the mission of Jesus. If Jesus had this kind of control over power and was inviting you into his mission and his ministry, then you HAD to be all in. Even though you might not understand everything that is happening, you would know, in the back of your mind that whatever you were going through would be ok. You had just seen and witnessed the kind of unimaginable power that Jesus had. Your faith would be strengthened and you would say, ok. I'm in no matter what. Whatever you tell me to do, wherever you tell me to go, I'm with you Jesus. I believe in you. I have faith in you.

An invitation to participate.

And that's what we been invited into. My friends, this is the kind of God we follow. This is who Jesus is. Mark leaves his readers with an unbelievable cliff-hanger and invite them to join Jesus.

It's an invitation for us to believe and to be challenged with our faith. Are we like the disciples who are shocked and awed as they have witnessed the most unbelievable thing that they've seen or do we read this passage and say – ok this is

craziness. I can't believe what I've just heard and for me this is where I get off the train.

This is the question that we are left with. If we are like the disciples, left with our shock and awe, we have only one response. Our response should be to believe and then ask ourselves how do we get on board with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This is where we are challenged with the words of Christ. Jesus says to his disciples,

“Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith?”

I would invite all of us to think deeply with what Jesus is asking us. Are we still afraid? Where is your faith?

When you are facing the storms of life and your world is collapsing around you. I would invite you to seek the face of Christ like the disciples. Call out to him and ask him to be your Saviour and your guide. In this moment you'll be amazed at how he responds. May you be like the disciples and be shocked and awed at his power over all things.

And all of God's people said.

Amen.