

Worrying Less and Trusting More

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I love this text. It is one of my absolute and long-time favorites. It has all the essential ingredients of a great and historic narrative: drama, surprise, danger, the ticking time-bomb of imminent destruction, and, of course, a happy ending. It's all here in this text recounting danger on the high seas, a test of courage for the disciples, miraculous power at the hands of Jesus, who is teaching his disciples a great lesson about *either* how to sleep during a storm, *or* how to focus our faith and trust in God's presence at those times in life when things are looking pretty bad. Clearly, it's the latter, since we're already good at sleeping through storms, on the job and off. We're also pretty good at not being focused on issues of trusting God through rough times, tough times, even good times, too.

What is interesting for Mark's treatment of our text is that this is the first and most decisive instance of the disciples failing big-time and appearing like rookies in panic mode. What's worse is that it gets worse. Up until now, the disciples have looked pretty good, individually and as a group. When Jesus calls, Andrew and Peter, James and John, and all of the Twelve hear the call and respond by immediately following Jesus (in chapter 1). As we move into chapter 2, demons are exorcised, lepers are cleansed, a paralytic is healed, and forgiven. In chapter 3, the Twelve are appointed, organized, instructed, and commissioned. Then we get to this text in chapter 4. We're told that a great storm arose, and waves beat into the boat as it was tossed to and fro on the sea. Rabbi, Teacher, Master, Lord, we're in danger, and you're asleep! Don't you care that we are perishing? Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind. He rebuked the wind, not the disciples. He said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased and calm came over the water. But the hearts of the disciples were still racing, and what happened to the winds blew their minds. "Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" That is part of the point. After all, we're only in chapter four in Mark's Gospel, and we're still going through the process of introducing Jesus to the readers. We've seen that the power of his Word commands demons, elicits obedience, empowers confidence, and now, displays an authority that comes *either* from his being lucky in predicting the weather, *or* from his sharing in the power of divine sovereignty. Again, "B" is the correct response.

It is Mark's style to be succinct, direct, and to the point. That is how he begins: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior." (Mark 1:1) Jesus is the Messiah and Christ, Son of David and Son of God, our Lord and Savior. It's all here in the beginning to Mark's Gospel, where Jesus is prophetically linked to John the Baptist. He forms a new community with the twelve disciples serving symbolically as leaders of a new Israel. He is a worker of miracles, forgiver of sins, commander of spirits, both evil and angelic, a great teacher, and now, the portrait is complete – even the wind and sea, all the elements of creation, bend to the will of Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior.

I love this text. Of course, it helps that I'm not in the boat. But I get the point – in theory, on paper, in my mind. Living the point, with real faith and actual trust, well, that's another story, although it is part of Mark's story, namely, that even the Twelve who were sitting right next to Jesus, clearly at peace within himself and in the storm, even the Twelve, with Jesus right there, freaked out and lost their focus, focusing more on the storm and their worries than on Jesus as the rock of our salvation, their anchor in every storm, the way to true life, and the source of lasting peace.

I read a great story in one of the best books I've ever come across that helps make this point superbly. It's a book that we published here at Zion two years ago, one in that series of tortuous exercises that produced a home-made stewardship guide back in Lent 2007, which we entitled *Why We Give*. What a gift those exercises continue to be! I'd like to read several paragraphs from the meditation offered for the twenty-second day of our Lenten journey back on March 17th of 2007. It was a gem, written by Steve Ross.

"Several years back," he writes, "I had the unsettling and unforgettable experience of navigating myself and my employees through being acquired by another company. I was a sales manager and I had several sales persons who worked for me. It was an awful experience as my coworkers and I speculated on whether we would have jobs following the closing of the deal. In hindsight, I realize how blissfully ignorant I was before the announcement, busily working at my job feeling that I was filling an important and essential role, never thinking that the security and comfort that I had built up over the years could come to an abrupt halt.

"The announcement was made in September. I remember it clearly, because at that time I was enthusiastic about the prospect of joining forces with another player in our same markets to form a stronger company. It had been announced that the deal would close in February, which meant that we would go roughly six months before the companies would join forces. It's funny how the prospect that I might find myself unemployed never crossed my mind until some weeks later. As rumors and information trickled out of the upper-management team orchestrating the budget, it became clearer that there were "synergies" expected through the combining of our two companies. This meant that there was overlap between the two companies and people would have to be laid off.

"With every new piece of information, my coworkers and I would find new justifications for why we shouldn't worry, but still we worried. I can't speak for everyone on my team, but I lost sleep. I became completely preoccupied with what would happen if I lost my job. I was miserable and so were my family and my coworkers." Can you hear the disciples crying out, "Lord, the sea around us is getting pretty scary. The winds are blowing harder with each gust. The waves are crashing over the sides of our boat! Don't you care, Lord, that everything is falling apart around us and we're perishing?" Of course, he does; and that's what Steve discovered. "Those of you who know me know that things ultimately worked themselves out." In fact, it was those changes that led the

Rosses to Ohio and to Zion, when the Timken Company bought the Torrington Company and brought the Rosses, and the Rhodes, and many others to our area.

“The lesson I learned,” Steve concludes, “is that all the worry and anguish I felt was unnecessary. My life is in God’s hands and all I needed to do was place more trust in Him.” Hold that thought, Steve. As some of you may know, the Timken Company was forced into some downsizing recently, and Steve’s division recently bore the brunt of it. When I showed up a little late for the Synod Assembly on Saturday, May 15, there I sat, blissfully ignorant of all that was not on our agenda inside the John S. Knight Center in Akron, and it was then that Steve told me that the day before had been his last day with Timken. It’s wonderful the way the Lord lets us learn these lessons about faith and trust, again and again and again ... right. Right or wrong, that’s what happens, with every new crisis that finds its way into disrupting the stability we seek and the security we desire.

But I’ve got to say that it was clear that Steve had learned the lesson he shared back in 2007. The news was shocking, but there was no panic on Steve’s face or in his demeanor. He looked at peace about it all. And you know what? Interest in his availability popped up. Interviews were scheduled. On-site visits were requested, and job offers were made, and now accepted. Praise God! Steve has accepted an offer from a bearings manufacturer in Poughkeepsie, New York. We’re happy for Steve and Linda, saddened by the prospect of losing them, worried about what that might mean for us, but challenged by the story he shared to worry less and trust more, challenged to obsess less about what we can’t control and trust more that God can and will, challenged to let go of our fears about what might happen and let God lay out the course for what will happen, trusting that God has a plan, but more important than a plan, God has a love for us that is greater than anything we can possibly imagine. In the end all things will work together for good, in accordance with God’s good purpose for us, for his kingdom, for the world.

You’ve got to love it when the storm subsides, the sun breaks through, and the stillness of an assuring calm fills the moment. But storms will continue to arise, and crises will come again and again. Steve’s story about lessons learned continues to lead to the place we need to be. He said it best. *All of our worry and anguish is unnecessary. Our lives are in God’s hands, and what we need do to is place more trust in Him*, individually as believers and together as a church, with special thought given to those whom we have just installed as church leaders. We’ve got to obsess less and trust more in the Lord whose living Word continues to bring calm to the waters ... and to our hearts. The prayer with which Steve ended his meditation back then in 2007 is a good way to end ours right here and now. “*Loving Lord, you want us to give thanks in all things, to lay all our cares on you, knowing that you care for us. Protect us from fears that feed on our anxiousness about life, and grant that no clouds in this constantly changing world of ours will ever hide from us the light of your love,*” which was decisively revealed way back then in the Gospel of Mark, and has been revealed to us right here and now, as we respond to the challenge to pray, to trust, and to live ... in Jesus’ name. Amen