

Mark 4: 35-41
Creekside COB
September 11, 2005

Peace! Be Still!

When today's service was planned back in July, it was developed around the theme of peace. Thinking about the service, a song went off in my head that asks, "*Peace, oh peace, when will we find it? When will we find peace?*" It is a good question. It is an urgent question.

I thought about the scarcity of peace and the proliferation of war. We were told that when the United States invaded Iraq, we would be welcomed by cheering, flower-bearing masses, and that Iraq's tyranny of terror would end. Within weeks we were told, "Mission accomplished!"

When the worship theme was selected, Hurricane Katrina was nothing more than a "*What if?*" scenario. As the war goes on, nature declared war on the Gulf Coast, ravaging it with unfathomable destruction. A searing light is fixed upon unheeded the warnings, abysmal preparations, and the slow response to suffering people marooned in a sea of sewage, sweltering heat, and inhuman conditions. The poor and destitute were left to fend for themselves. For some reason, Wal-Mart was able to come to people's aid while FEMA said the people couldn't be reached.

President Bush has proclaimed September 16 a national day of prayer for all the victims whose lives and livelihoods have been lost. Lord knows those people will need help from on high. But we also need a national day of confession for living in a great nation of great wealth that chooses not to see the plight of its own people and withholds its abundance from those who live at the bottom.

I can't get that song out of my head. *"Peace, oh peace, when will we find it? When will we find peace?"* I don't know how many people who have lost everything are all that concerned about peace—not when their main concern is their next meal and how they are going to start all over.

But we can and must ask it. "Where is it?" Don't look to government—it knew the disaster was coming days in advance and failed at every level. So what *is* the answer that people of faith cling to in a time like this? Does anyone know where the love of God goes in the fury of a category five hurricane?

Lots of hymns have been sung in Louisiana and Mississippi—hymns like, *"O God Our Help in Ages Past."* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can tell us about God's help. Moses, David, and Solomon can tell us. John the Baptist, and Paul can tell us. John and Jane Doe can tell us. All have stories to tell about God's present help in times of trouble.

We have our own stories of God helping us in days and ages past. But what about, *"...our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home."* What is there to say to people whose shelters were reduced to splinters or flooded? What do we say about thousands souls looking for an eternal home having been taken out of their earthly one?

Let's go back to the night the disciples were out to sea. A windstorm whipped the Sea of Galilee into frenzy. Waves beat against their boat, spilling sheets of water over the gunnels. They weren't singing hymns. They were nervous wrecks, wondering how their captain could be sleeping in the stern. They couldn't take it any longer and woke him. "Teacher, we thought you should know we're on the verge of drowning. Do you care?"

In New Orleans folks were on housetops and in tree limbs holding on to each other or whatever they could grab. They were crying, *"God, we can't hold on much longer. Do you care?"* God didn't make it stop that instant. Katrina wasn't going to quit until she was ready.

But God was very much present. God does care. In the hymn, Move in Our Midst, we sing, “*Walk with us through the storm and the calm. Spirit of God, go thou with us still.*” It’s easier to sense the Presence in the calm than the storm. But we are promised that Jesus is present in the calm and the storm and in the Superdome. Jesus did more than teach peace. Jesus was peace. Jesus is our peace.

Mark includes a little detail that isn’t in the other gospel versions of this story. He says, “And other boats were with him.” Mark doesn’t say if the other boats heard Jesus say, “Peace! Be still!” Mark doesn’t say if the others put two and two together, but the disciples did. When they reached shore, I suspect the disciples were telling everyone what happened and how his word of peace brought calm to the chaos.

As he overlooked Jerusalem and saw it for the last time before his death, Jesus wept over it and said, “*Would that you knew the things that make for peace.*” He still weeps over great places like Washington D.C. and over all the capitols were those in power still think that peace will come after we drop enough bombs and kill a sufficient number of the enemy. He died in order to establish peace between God and broken humanity. He died to unleash his peace in an anxious through you and me.

We have seen a variety of spirits during the past two weeks—the spirit of confusion, the spirit of depravity and selfishness. But we have also seen the Holy Spirit at work. We have seen it take possession of ordinary people and inspire them to awesome acts of bravery, kindness, and generosity. People have opened their hearts and homes to total strangers and said, “What is mine is yours.”

Let’s not get wrapped up in questions about how a good God can allow terrible forces of nature to cause such suffering. If we do, we risk not seeing the remarkable evidences of God’s presence. As someone said, “God is anguished; but God is alive and God is active.

As disciples we are the people of his peace... a peace that is not of this world; a peace that passes understanding; a peace the world can't give or take away. In dark days like these, the great need is to keep our anxieties in check and find ways to express the peace of Christ we have been taught and experienced in our own lives.

I am reminded of the King who commissioned an artist to paint a picture of peace. After working months on the piece, the painting was unveiled for the king. It was a beautiful landscape of wooded hills surrounding a flower-filled, lush meadow with a lovely stream meandering through it. Birds flew against an azure blue sky and the scene was bathed in sunshine and serenity. It was beautiful, but then the King saw it

When the second painted was unveiled, it was very different. The sky was dark and fierce. Strong winds and driving rain pummeled the landscape. Bolts of lightning streaked across the background. The trees bowed and the meadow grasses were driven flat by the winds. But from a corner of the picture, there was a slit in the dark sky, just enough for a beam of sunlight to break through. The beam illumined a portion of tree limb on which there sat a little bird singing its solitary song. Studying the painting, the King said, "Ahhh... this is it. This is peace. The ability to sing in the midst of the storm."