

Mark 4:35-41

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Raleigh Mission Trip Commissioning Service

Hampton Baptist

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“The Power of Words”

Today's New Testament Lesson provides a message for *all* of us, including fathers and those going on the mission trip. It is a familiar story, one which many of us first heard as children.

We enter the story after Jesus had spent a long day of teaching with one parable after another, all of which were focusing on the Kingdom of God. Because of the crowd size, he had taught from the boat. And after a demanding day of teaching, using *words* to paint pictures to illustrate the Kingdom of God, Jesus told the disciples that they were going to go to the other side of the sea . . . and by now, the sun was setting. I wonder if these new disciples questioned the decision. Why depart when your popularity is on the rise? People were flocking to him, and it made more sense to continue the success rather than to go to the other side of the tracks, or should I say the other side of the sea, where people were different from them; those people didn't even believe in God. But the disciples trusted and obeyed. The journey would also provide a rare occasion of just Jesus and the disciples.

So, without stepping off the boat, with no change of clothes or overnight bags, they left the shore to sail to the other side. Common to the Sea of Galilee were sudden and violent squalls. Almost without warning these storms developed, and remember they were sailing at night. Perhaps the inability to see stars and the moon would have been their only indicator. This was a scary, unexpected, life-flashing-before-your-eyes kind of storm.

Many of us have found ourselves *surprised* by having to face a scary, unexpected storm. The report from the doctor provides test results which were totally unexpected. The phone rings interrupting a peaceful night's sleep to deliver bad news. A trusted friend proves not to be so trustworthy. We all face storms and to varying degrees. Having to face one storm can hook memories of a previous storm which did not have a happy ending. None of us are exempt from storms, not even if we profess Christ as our Savior. Having Jesus in the boat did not keep the storm away; *everyone* faces storms.

The disciples couldn't scoop water from the boat fast enough; they frantically bailed as if their lives depended upon it . . . because it did. All the teaching of the day – stories of mustard seeds, growing seeds, lamp stands, sower and soils seemed so *academic* and *theoretical* when faced with the practicality of a life and death situation. The disciples were not alone, although they *acted* as if they were alone. The world around them was one enormous storm of wind, wave, and rising water.

For them, none of the parables seemed important in the *instant*; anxiety was driving the team to survive the storm, for if they did *not* survive, nothing else would matter. For them, there was only *one* thing to do – bail water. If water came over the rail, they were to try to scoop out the standing water on the deck and throw it back.

The reaction was understandable. The disciples took immediate action in doing what they *knew* how to do, perhaps what they had done in their fishing professions in previous storms. We should *not* fault them – they simply were doing what they knew how to do – which is our default problem-solving posture.

Perhaps impetuous Peter began to bark orders: “As a fisherman, I *know* what to do – follow my lead. I remember the storm of 28 – didn't think we'd survive, but look at us today. Matthew, Andrew, Judas, grab a bucket and go starboard. Simon the Zealot and James the Lesser, son of Alphaeus, go to the port side. Thaddaeus and Philip go to the bow. James and John, find more buckets! Thomas and Bartholomew, you need to be helping. If we don't get busy, this night-time cruise could be a *nightmare*! By the way, where in the world is Jesus?”

Maybe in the search for more buckets, James and John, those seasoned fishermen, found Jesus asleep in the stern. According to Mark's account, Jesus was quite the sound sleeper, because he was sleeping peacefully through the storm! His choice of slumber over distress aggravated those who found the sleeping savior. Their tone was not kind. "Teacher, do you not *care* that we are on our way to a liquid grave? It's been a great day to listen to you, but now we are in trouble. We need *more* than puzzling parables. We need you to *care* that we might not make it. The others are doing what they know to do. They are trying to solve this problem just like they have done before on other occasions."

So Jesus woke up and did the unexpected. He did not reach for a bucket, nor did he grab an oar. Instead, he rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea. "Peace. Be still!" Jesus told tumultuous waves to be peaceful. He told crashing surf to be still. The rebuke of the wind caused it to cease. There was a dead calm, and in an instant, the sea was like a sheet of glass.

The storm had frightened the disciples, even the seasoned fishermen, those who had faced these kinds of storms on other occasions. I think they expected Jesus to join them in doing what *they* knew how to do; I suppose, that in awaking Jesus, they fully expected him to join them in solving the problem with tried and true means based upon their prior experiences. What they got instead was a glimpse at *God*, the one who was not limited to how things had been done on other occasions.

There was *power* in Jesus' words, not only to the *storm*, but to the disciples. Not only then, but now also. Jesus' words *still* have power. So he then turned his words to the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Why choose fear over faith?"

We can certainly identify with the disciples and would have also been surprised that Jesus could calm the storm with his words. Why would *we* be afraid in a life-flashing-before-your-eyes kind of storm? Perhaps, like those on the boat, we would have thought, "Why are we scared? Because we thought we were going to die. Our drenched clothes bear witness of the tremendous storm. Our wet hair resulted from waves crashing onto the boat. Our wrinkly feet came from standing in water so long. Near-death experiences affect us; they leave us frightened. It is a defense-mechanism. We naturally get scared when faced with danger. Fear grips us when our health or well-being becomes threatened."

Fear is a reaction, not a response. Jesus said to the twelve scared, soaking-wet, soggy disciples, "Why allow instincts to bring fear, when if your focus is on me, you can *choose* faith?"

With widened eyes and dropped jaws, they marveled that he had authority over the created order. They questioned his identity. Who is he? They had never experienced anyone who could bring peace to their storms and calm to their fears. The English translation "in great awe" doesn't give justice to the original words; perhaps a better rendering of the phrase is "They feared a great fear." The storm was frightening, but the disciples became a bit apprehensive that not only was Jesus a great teacher, but he also possessed great power, even over the created order. Words can bring peace, and words can calm storms.

Fathers, this message cannot be emphasized enough. What we say leaves marks on our children. That statement contains good news and bad news; the outcome solely relies on the father, not on the children. Personally, I have found the idiom "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," to be grossly untrue, because there is power in words. A father helps mold a child's character, self-esteem, and personality simply with words.

To those going on the mission trip: *what* we say this week and *how* we speak this week will have an affect on those with whom we are ministering. Many whom we encounter will find

themselves in the middle of a storm; their anxiety might be heightened; their present in peril; their future in jeopardy. Our words of hope can prove powerful; what we say can and will make a difference. There is power in words.

Fred Craddock retired as a Preaching Professor at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He and his wife were eating in a restaurant in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, when an old guy wearing overalls walked by their table. He stopped, turned, and said to the Craddocks, "Hey, I don't know you. What's your name?" Ever meet people like that?

Craddock, not wanting to be bothered said "Fred . . . Fred Craddock." The old guy said, "What do you do?"

Craddock wanting to turn him off said, "I am a professor of homiletics at a theological seminary."

The old guy said, "I know. You're a preacher." And as he grabbed a chair, pulled it up, and sat down, he said, "Mind if I join you? I want to tell you a preacher story."

Looking out the window, he said, "You see those hills? I was born in those hills, but little boys and girls like me who were born to unwed mothers were ostracized and treated terribly. By the time I was three years old, the other children would scarcely play with me. Their parents would say ridiculous things like, "We don't want a boy like that playing with our children," as if I had anything to do at all with my birth. Saturday was the toughest day of all. My mom would take me down to the little general store to buy our supplies for the week. Invariably, the other parents in the store would make caustic comments like, "Did you ever figure out who his Daddy is?"

"In those days there was no kindergarten. So at age six, I entered the first grade. Like the other children, I was given my very own desk. And at recess, I stayed at that little desk and studied, because none of the other children would play with me. At noon, I could be found eating all alone. It was awful.

"When I was thirteen, a new preacher came to this town, and everybody wanted to hear this new preacher, because he was soooo good. So I went to hear him . . . I'd never been to church before, but I went to hear this preacher. And he WAS good. So good, that I went every Sunday. I would always get there late and leave early so I'd never have to talk to anyone coming or going. But I went. One Sunday, he was so good, I forgot to get up and leave. Before I realized what was going on, the service was over, and people were squeezed into the aisles, and I couldn't get out of there. As I pushed through the crowd, I suddenly felt this heavy hand on my shoulder, and I turned around. This big, tall preacher man was looking down at me and he said, "Boy, what's your name? What's your name, boy?"

"Before I could answer, the preacher man asked a second question: "Who's your father? Who's your father, boy? Who's your father?" And when he asked me, "Who's your father?", it was like a knife had run into my stomach. Pain shot to my toes. Pain shot to my head. In that instant, I felt agony. He had asked me the one question that I had never wanted anyone to ask: "Who's your father?"

"As I stood there cringing, he said, "Boy, I asked you that question, because I know who your father is. Boy, the name of your father is . . . GOD. God is your father, boy. Don't you ever forget that you are a child of God."

The old man, moved by the telling of his own story, wiped away a tear and asked to be excused. As he got up from the table, he said, "When that preacher told me that I was a child of God, and that God was my father, my whole life changed."

As he left the table, the waitress hustled over and said, "Do you know to whom you were speaking?"

Craddock said, "Some old guy named Ben."

She said, "That was Ben Hooper, the Governor of Tennessee." Ben Hooper's life was changed and given significance, because he knew he was a child of God.

The power of words. To fathers, to those going on the mission trip, to everyone present today: Let's be mindful that what we say *does* leave lasting impressions. Let's remember that words cannot only calm storms; words can change lives. And let's never forget that we serve a Savior who is more powerful than any storm we experience and that we have been called to share his love with everyone, and that we can do so, even with words.