

This past week at camp, we did a lot of walking—to the dining hall and back to the cabins, to the pool, to the pavilion, to the lake, to the craft area, to worship—back and forth across the campground. I had more steps logged on my smart watch in those few days than I can remember accumulating any other time. Even though the physical activity was good for me, there were times that I longed to be still, to sit motionless and watch the young campers joyfully engage in playful activities while I rested.

When I returned to the office after camp and began thinking about the passage from Mark's Gospel, I must confess that several times I found myself motionless for short period of times, resting after the intense activity of church camp.

Although Jesus wasn't with a group of young children, the intensity and pace of his life may have felt like a never-ending week at camp. Rather than campers with bug bites or upset tummies, Jesus faced large crowds of those who needed healing from illness and the painful evils of the world. In the midst of telling stories about God to the crowds, he suggested to his smaller group of

disciples that they head to the other side of the lake, possibly to get away for a while so he could give them some private instruction, for he sometimes explained his cryptic parables when he was alone with them.

During this retreat from the crowd, however, they encountered an unexpected storm, catching them by surprise in the middle of the lake. Waves washed over the side of the boat, and the disciples began to panic. You would think that a group of experienced fishermen would be prepared for these kinds of storms, which were common on the Sea of Galilee. Instead, they turned to Jesus, a carpenter more skilled with woodworking than fishing. They surprisingly found him taking a nap on the boat, seemingly unaware of the tempest swirling around them.

The Hebrew scriptures give us an insight into their thoughts, for the writer of Psalm 69 used the imagery of a storm to represent his enemies:

<sup>14</sup> "Don't let me sink in the mud,  
but save me from my enemies  
and from the deep water.

<sup>15</sup> Don't let me be  
swept away by a flood  
or drowned in the ocean  
or swallowed by death.

Psalm 89 suggested that God controlled the raging waters:

<sup>8</sup> You are LORD God All-Powerful!

No one is as loving  
and faithful as you are.

<sup>9</sup> You rule the roaring sea  
and calm its waves.

So, when the disciples go to Jesus for help, they were seeking more than a carpenter's advice; they sought the power of God, the One who could calm the storms of life.

I imagine you have also experienced the storms of life, especially during this past year when many have wondered if they would live to see their next birthday. We faced an enemy of a tiny virus, but it feels just as powerful as the psalmist's unidentified enemies. Or, to use Mark's imagery, rather than riding out the storm on a boat with the disciples, we found our life jackets keeping us afloat this past year through the medical staff caring for those who were ill and the researchers creating a vaccine. Churches have served as our boats, the vehicles of hope through the chaos. How many of you have tuned in virtually to listen or made an effort to get

to church to hear a word of hope, longing to hear some good news? During the storm of the past year, sadly some churches have closed their doors, unable to maintain their facilities and cope with ongoing expenses. Many families have lost loved ones. Events were canceled. Plans changed. Travel curtailed. You may have felt like the disciples, seeing the waves crashing over the edge of the boat, crying out in fear.

In all the chaos on that boat 2000 years ago, Jesus spoke two Greek words, often translated as "Peace. Be still." We often imagine Jesus speaking these words to the water, bringing calm to the storm, but in looking at the Greek words, they suggest otherwise. The first word, *σιῶπα* (*siopa*), means "hush" or "be silent, hold your peace." The second word, *πεφίμωσο* (*pephimoso*) means "to make silent" or "put on a muzzle." It seems as though Jesus was telling his disciples, "Quiet down. Put a sock in it."

Jesus' response reminds me of Psalm 46 that refers to the roaring seas and trembling mountains when God said: "Be still, and know that I am God." The Hebrew word in this psalm often translated as "be still" could also be translated as "relax." It's not a suggestion, for

3

the verb is in the imperative form, meaning it's an urgent command. Our younger folks might express the idea by saying, "Chill out, will you."

Is that really possible to do? To get quiet in a storm? To chill out in chaos? To find peace in strife? Author Kathleen Norris writes about times of silence in our ordinary days that may be filled with struggle:

I have come to believe that the true mystics are not those who contemplate holiness in isolation, reaching godlike illumination in serene silence, but those who manage to find God in a life filled with noise, the demands of other people and relentless daily duties that can consume the self. ... If they are wise, they treasure the rare moments of solitude and silence that come their way, and use them not to escape, to distract themselves with television and the like. Instead, they listen for a sign of God's presence and they open their hearts toward prayer.<sup>1</sup>

In all the noises around us, when we quiet ourselves to listen, we might gain a sense of

calmness and direction, as one job applicant discovered.

A shipping company had advertised a job opening for a ship's radio operator and the outer office was crowded with applicants for the position. They were waiting to be called in turn, and were talking to each other loudly enough to be heard over the sound of a loudspeaker.

Another applicant entered, filled out an application, and sat quietly for a few moments. Suddenly, he rose and walked into the office marked "Private." A few minutes later, he came out wearing a broad grin—he had been hired.

A man in the waiting room protested. "Look here," he said. "We were here first, why did you go in there before us?"

The successful applicant replied, "Any one of you could have landed that job, but none of you were listening to the Morse code signals coming over the loudspeaker. The message was, 'We desire to fill this position with someone who is constantly alert. If you are getting this message, come into the private office immediately.'"<sup>2</sup>

When you face the next storm in your life, be still, listen, and hear Jesus offer you words of hope: "Peace. Be still. I am with you in the storm."

---

*for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers.* Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #527.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and "Women's Work"* (Paulist, 1998), 1, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations*