

“Hold On” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 4 – June 23, 2024

- I. **Mark 4:39** – And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.
- II. **Good snowpack in the winter means high runoff in the spring.**
 - a. I used to work at a resort in Steamboat, Colorado, and June was always prime whitewater rafting season.
 - i. If the winter was very good and snowpack was deep, the rivers all over Colorado were full of people looking for a little adventure.
 - ii. I don’t remember how many rafting trips I booked for guests, but it was well into the 100’s.
 - iii. Whitewater rafting is broken into categories, or classes of rapids.
 1. A class 2 or 3 is pretty easy going, while class 5 and above is pretty extreme.
 - iv. My friend, Jeff, decided to take an expert raft trip, which required that each person had experience with whitewater rafting, and they could swim at least ten laps in a pool.
 1. After the trip I asked him how everything went, and he said he was knocked out of the raft in one of the most technical parts of the river... and when I say technical, I mean the highest rapids.
 2. He said that fear gripped him as he was completely untethered from the raft, rushing down the rapids and trying to keep his head above water.
 3. The scariest part was the unknown under the surface... because he never knew if a rock or submerged tree might slam into his legs or body as he flew down river.
 4. For Jeff, this was no controlled ride where it just seems scary (like a roller coaster), but his life flashed before his eyes because he could have easily drowned that day.
 5. All the strength and ability Jeff had could not match a raging river – and he would be the first to tell you to respect the power of water.
 - b. The ancient Israelites were not seafaring or maritime people... so they often worked with others along the coast to get their supplies from the Mediterranean Sea.
 - i. In fact, the Israelites read the stories of the Old Testament, including Job, Isaiah, and Psalms that talked about bodies of water connecting to the deep, or the unknown.
 - ii. The waters that saved the Israelites in the Red Sea as it was separated by God’s hand also covered over the Egyptians and they perished in the depths.

- iii. The sea was also home to Leviathan, or a giant beast that represented evil and chaos...
 - 1. The prophet Isaiah points to the day God delivers us from our trials... “In that day the LORD with His hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and He will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” (Isaiah 27:1)
- iv. Yet, God’s people also trusted that He was in charge of the deep, just as our reading in Job tells us, and here is Psalm 77, “When the waters saw You, O God, when the waters saw You, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.” (Psalm 77:16)

III. **The disciples had a scary ride on that fateful trip in our Gospel reading.**

- a. When we went to Israel and took a tour on the Sea of Galilee, our tour guide told us that Mt. Hermon sends cold air down to the waters and creates huge waves on occasion.
- b. Jesus had just completed a very long day of preaching and teaching along the shoreline, with crowds so big He had to get in a boat to teach.
 - i. I can imagine that He was exhausted from spending hours dealing with people and sharing His message of the reign of God among them.
 - ii. So, He goes up to the head of the boat, crawls under the cover that allowed the person to stand at the stern, and passes out.
 - 1. It seems hard to believe that Jesus would stay asleep as the storm began to kick up big waves and the boat was taking on water...
 - 2. Yet, He was sleeping until the panicked disciples finally got Him up and said, “Jesus! You care about us, right? We are about to die!”
 - 3. So Jesus, being God, stands up and tells the storm, the waves, and sea to “Shut up! And stay that way!” (put a muzzle on it!)
 - a. And everything changed to calm and quiet... peace.
 - b. Psalm 107 says, “²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. ²⁹ He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. (Psalm 107:28-29)
 - c. And referring to the Exodus from Egypt, Psalm 106 says, “⁹ God rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry, and He led them through the deep as through a desert. ¹⁰ So He saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.” (Psalm 106:9-10)
 - i. In the same way, Jesus rebukes the sea to save.

- c. What creates more fear in the disciples... the waves crashing against their boat threatening to drown them in the deep... or Jesus, who shows His divine nature by using His words to calm a storm?
 - i. There in the presence of the living God, the disciples were in awe.
 - ii. The Old Testament passages they had read from youth were stirring around in their heads, as the Lord God calmed the seas.
- d. Jesus asks the disciples why they were so afraid and still have no faith.
 - i. It seems that Jesus was showing what trusting the Father is like... by sleeping through a raging storm without a care in the world.
 - 1. Just imagine taking a whitewater rafting trip and snuggling up in the front of the raft and taking a nap through the whole thing.

IV. **What happens to us when we go through the raging storms of life?**

- a. Do we wonder if God even cares that we are perishing?
 - i. Are we angry with God, wondering why He would let things happen?
 - ii. Do we hold on for dear life with white knuckles but zero control?
 - iii. Are we terrified by the unknown, waiting for evil to drown us?
 - iv. Do we turn to the Lord to deliver us and wait for His timing?
 - v. Do we turn to Scripture and recite it for our peace and strength?
 - 1. As Psalm 27 says, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (Psalm 27:1, 14)
 - vi. Most of us fall somewhere in between... as fear and faith come and go depending on the situation or circumstances.
- b. Chaos and trouble will always be a part of our lives, and some of you have experienced this even recently.
- c. It's interesting, but God doesn't tell us to hold on tightly through the storm... He says to let go... and let Him do the heavy lifting.
 - i. We don't hold on through our own power, but we let go as God has a hold on us.
- d. Nothing is more challenging than allowing God to work... as we let go... because it feels like we will plunge into the depths of the darkness.
 - i. Jesus is calling His disciples... and us... to a greater faith in His work to keep us, redeem us, and restore us.

V. **God, Jesus Himself**, came into this broken, violent world to give us peace.

- a. Jesus gives us peace in the storm, even when we don't know how He will work in the process.
- b. Jesus took death and our sins upon Himself, and He was nailed to a cross so that they would be destroyed forever.
 - i. Not only that, but as He sent the Holy Spirit forth to call people into the faith, He used water... not to destroy, but save... in Baptism.

- ii. The water that might cause so much destruction was the same water that would save us... by drowning the old Adam and sin.
- iii. That claim through Baptism is God's way of putting His hold on us that cannot be broken by anything...
- c. Yes, the world rages on, and we are often struggling to deal with hardships and the heartache... but God always reminds us that He is here, and through faith we can let Him take care of all that is needed.
- d. God has a hold on you by grace through faith; let go and trust in His love and care for you. Amen.