

No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life Lesson 4

Today we continue to think about what it means to live a life that proclaims “No turning back-living the surrendered life.” Great title! ...but a difficult concept to get our lives and hearts around though.

Mark 4:1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

Whenever I hear words like “on the lake” I can’t help but think about delightful images of water and birds and reminders of God’s wonders. Sometimes I daydream about the quiet walk “by the sea,” or about those days when Jessika was small and we would walk around Doris pond or I find myself daydreaming about that cruise Helen and I want to take “by sea” to the Caribbean. For many of us the mere mention of water typically brings images of tame waters, often inviting and most assuredly—romantic. The mention of water can easily bring images of tranquility.

However, Mark sees the water a little different than most of us do. For Mark, the sea is really this metaphor for the chaos that confronts Jesus in his ministry and often times terrorizes his disciples and therefore threatens the gospel message. For Mark, the sea does not conjure images of romantic cruises, and calm, tranquil waters. For Mark, the sea conjures images of turbulence. The sea for Mark is more than a geographical location. It’s more of a place where discipleship is challenged, and where boundaries are impassable, and where life always seems to just hang in the balance.

Three times Mark brings the image of water to his readers in Chapter 4. And at first blush in 4:1 Mark mentions the sea and all seems calm. It’s nice to see Jesus stepping into a boat in order to teach the masses in parables and then later teaches his disciples privately. But to the informed reader Mark shows red flags to his readers that something big, something dangerous is coming. Something they are going to want to pay attention to.

Mark 4:35-41 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Mark tells us this story because it’s a true story. It’s a true story about Jesus, it’s a true story about the disciples and it’s a true story about the sea! The Word talks about the sea. After all, it was God who led his people through that Red Sea over into safety.

The Psalmist also knows about the sea as well.

Psa., 69:1,2- Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

2 I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me.

Psa., 89:8,9- O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. 9 You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.

Psa. 93:3-4- The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. 4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the LORD on high is mighty.

Psa. 46:1-3- God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

The Psalmist knows about water.

You can also hear the echo of the Psalmist as the disciples cry to Jesus for help while in the boat. **Psa. 44:23-26** Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. 24 Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? 25 We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. 26 Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.

As the disciples get into the boat with Jesus in order to go to the other side, the suspense builds. Jesus is sleeping. The disciples have experienced a lot about Jesus. The disciples are probably holding hands in a prayer circle singing “Jesus is Lord, my redeemer.” But then this boat turns into the storm tossed boat that moves the disciples from song to panic (Jesus, don’t you care?!). Despite all that these disciples have experienced and been taught, they still know very little about Jesus; but their past experiences indicate that they know a lot about the sea.

Sound like a familiar story? If you have ever watched a loved one slowly fade away into death, you know about the sea. You know how the flood of emotions can turn clear thinking into a dense fog. You know what it’s like to cry out, “God, I’m sinking. Don’t you care?”

Sound like a familiar story? If you have ever said good-bye to a job you love, you know about the sea. You know about the uncertainty of the future. You ask questions like, “am I skilled enough?” Or will you have the energy to start all over for the first time again? And so you just sit and stare into the future as if it were an angry sea and you cry out, “God, I’m sinking. Don’t you care?”

Sound like a familiar story? You know about the sea, at least when you face society’s measure of being too old. Some of you know what I’m talking about. You go for the interview for yet another job and all you do is hit another glass ceiling while you hear the lame excuse that you’re not right for the job, while people half your age with only a quarter of the experience and skill get the job.

You know about the sea if you are stuck between doing what you know is right and what you have been told to do, while knowing clearly what will happen to you if you refuse to do it. Oh, you know

about the sea if you dread going home to artificial silence where the love you once had is gone and you're just going through the motions. And as the sea roars in your life, like the disciples on that boat, you panic inside and you cry out to the heavens, "God, I'm sinking. Don't you care?"

Then we see the disciples imitating the captain on Jonah's boat (Jonah 1:6). They go to the one who is evidently sleeping through all this chaos and shout, "How could you sleep in a time like this?" Oh, Mark is a master here. You can almost see the smile on his face as he shows Jesus' response- "Did I tell you to wake me up? Before we set sail I told you everything you needed to know about God and about faith. Did you not understand?" You see what Mark is doing here? He's asking who is really asleep in the boat? And who really needs to wake up?

Then Jesus stills the storm. What he really does is rebuke it! You'd think this would be the time to get back in that prayer circle and sing once again "Jesus is Lord, my redeemer." But that's not what they do. Instead, they sort of scratch their heads and ask, who is this guy and how'd he do dat? Frankly, this sort of misses the point!

Mark is preaching about a life in Christ in which the sea is no longer a threat to us. But the disciples never seem to get that message. They do not seem to understand Jesus nor grasp the life he is promising them. And now I wonder, what about us? And what about the raging sea in our lives?

I suggest that the best explanation may come from a German monk who wrote more than 500 years ago. He was thrown out of the church and fearful for his very life. He found himself hiding in a dark, musty castle surrounded by a sea of uncertainty that ultimately threatened to take his life. Martin Luther wrote these words: "And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo! His doom is sure, One little word shall fell him."

God's word for us today is: No more sea! God cares about us. No more sea! God does not sleep. No more sea! God hears us. No more sea! God loves us. No more sea! God leads us besides the still waters. No more sea!

Amen and amen!

God's call for us today is to stop turning back, and live the surrendered life!

The Jesus Creed

By Brian McLaren

We have confidence in Jesus

Who healed the sick, the blind, and the paralyzed.
And even raised the dead.

He cast out evil powers and
Confronted corrupt leaders.
He cleansed the temple.
He favored the poor.
He turned water into wine,

Walked on water, calmed storms.

He died for the sins of the world,
Rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father,
Sent the Holy Spirit.

We have confidence in Jesus

Who taught in word and example,
Sign and wonder.

He preached parables of the kingdom of God
On hillsides, from boats, in the temple, in homes,
At banquets and parties, along the road, on beaches, in towns,
By day and by night.

He taught the way of love for God and neighbor,
For stranger and enemy, for outcast and alien.

We have confidence in Jesus,

Who called disciples, led them,
Gave them new names and new purpose
And sent them out to preach good news.
He washed their feet as a servant.
He walked with them, ate with them,
Called them friends,
Rebuked them, encouraged them,
Promised to leave and then return,
And promised to be with them always.

He taught them to pray.
He rose early to pray, stole away to desolate places,
Fasted and faced agonizing temptations,
Wept in a garden,
And prayed, "Not my will but your will be done."
He rejoiced, he sang, he feasted, he wept.

We have confidence in Jesus,

So we follow him, learn his ways,
Seek to obey his teaching and live by his example.
We walk with him, walk in him, abide in him,
As a branch in a vine.

We have not seen him, but we love him.
His words are to us words of life eternal,
And to know him is to know the true and living God.
We do not see him now, **but we have confidence in Jesus.**

Amen.

I'm not sure what this means for you today. "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, I'll follow him."

Song- 674 I have decided to follow Jesus.

Pray

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