



**“The Other Side”**  
**Scripture – Mark 4:35-41**  
**Sermon preached by Sudie Niesen Thompson**  
**Sunday, June 24, 2018**

The storm came out of nowhere. We were out on Table Rock Lake in Cousin Bert’s seventeen-foot ski boat, miles away from the cabin that promised shelter from the squall. My dad looked up to see clouds — steel gray and heavy with rain — tumbling over the cliffs and rolling down the lake. So we snatched up the skis, reeled in the rope, and snapped on the boat’s canvas cover, which was our only defense against the wind and rain. As we sped — full throttle — toward the resort, the lake churned beneath us, causing the little boat to bounce violently across the waves. With each rumble of thunder, I grew more and more nervous that my five-foot-frame would be tossed overboard. So I hit the floor and pressed my body against the wooden planks covering the storage hatch in the middle of the boat until we pulled safely into the dock.

That storm over Table Rock paled in comparison to the one Mark describes rolling in over Galilee and threatening the disciples’ journey. This is no ordinary windstorm; the tempest is strong enough to make a boat-full of *professional* fishermen fear for their lives. Elsewhere, the Greek word is translated “hurricane.” So, it seems we’re talking about winds strong enough to rip the roof off your house, scattering shingles in the school yard blocks away. This is not the kind of storm you enjoy from the screened-in porch on a summer evening; it’s the kind that sends you scrambling to board up windows and stock up on bottled water.

And those poor disciples ... They are caught in the middle of it — trapped on a small, wooden boat far from shore. Peter had not checked the weather forecast. James had no time to grab the life jackets. Andrew had held his tongue, even though he knew it would’ve been prudent to wait until morning. Instead, the disciples heeded Christ’s call to go across to the other side, though darkness was closing in and they had not prepared for the journey. So here they are — bailing water out of the boat as gale-force winds threaten to topple each and every one of them into the Sea.

Yet, Jesus — the one who got them into this mess — is oblivious to the danger at hand. Despite howling winds and raging waves, Jesus is asleep ... curled up on a pillow at the back of the boat. The disciples have to shake him awake. “Teacher,” they cry. “Do you not care they we are perishing?!”

Of course he does care, and he responds accordingly. But — even as chaos overwhelms them, even before the winds fall silent and the waves grow still — Jesus is at peace. The storm does not faze him.

I suppose his calm could have something to do with his authority over the wind and waves. But, I think there’s more to it. You see, for Mark’s Jesus, peril comes with the territory. It’s all part of carrying out his ministry ...

On this point I am indebted to the scholarship of Matt Skinner, Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary.<sup>1</sup> As he observes in his commentary on this text, Jesus is drawn to liminal spaces throughout Mark's Gospel. He's drawn to in-between spaces. To "sites of transition and risk"<sup>2</sup> ... There is the graveyard, which blurs the line between the living and the dead. And the sickbed, where Jairus' daughter languishes on the brink of death. And the cross, where Jesus hangs in between this world and the next. And there are geographical boundaries, as well: mountains and deserts, and cities on the edge of something else ... and — of course — the Sea of Galilee, the body of water that separates the Jews from the Gentiles. All liminal spaces. In-between spaces.

Time and again, Jesus shows up in these "borderlands" — sites where people cross the dividing lines between what is known and what is foreign, between what is safe and what is threatening. These are liminal spaces. In-between spaces.

As the story before us illustrates, these spaces are perilous. The storm that rages over the Sea just *highlights* the risk inherent in crossing over to the other side. It is a journey that forces the disciples to come toe-to-toe with death, as they face the very-real threat of being swallowed up by the Sea.

Yet, Jesus is compelled to go. Even though they have not planned this voyage, even though they cannot reach the far shore before nightfall, Jesus commands his disciples to set out across the Sea. As Matt Skinner points out, "Nothing will inhibit his desire to do ministry on 'the other side.'"<sup>3</sup>

So Jesus and his disciples journey into this liminal space, this in-between space. And before they can cross the Sea of Galilee, a violent storm blows in and threatens their very life.

I can no longer read this text without thinking of another borderland, of another in-between space flooded with people who dared cross over to the other side. As the news from our southern border so tragically illustrates, this journey is also full of risk. For here, too, a storm is raging. At this boundary, which separates one people from another, heartless winds rip children from their parents' arms, and waves of cruelty batter migrants who are already drowning — already gasping for air as the seas of gang violence or political turmoil inundate their homelands.

Thanks be to God, the president has put an end to the practice of separating families at the border. But the storm has left devastation in its wake. This policy has traumatized the traumatized, inflicting emotional distress that may have consequences for years to come. And, still, parents languish in jail cells — distraught because they do not know the whereabouts of their children. And children — toddlers, babies — cry out for their parents from make-shift cages.

It breaks my heart. I imagine it breaks yours too. It is a crisis that blurs our *own* dividing lines — between Democrat and Republican, between proponents of the wall and immigration advocates. Because we can all agree that tearing apart families who are seeking asylum is wrong. It is cruel. It is unjust. It is immoral.

And — as the church of Jesus Christ — we cannot ignore the suffering of our neighbors. We must raise our voices and echo their lament: *Do you not care that we are perishing?!*

*Do you not care that we are drowning? That we are gasping for air as the wind and waves threaten to destroy us?* It is the cry of those caught in the storm — at our southern border, on the Sea of Galilee, at every borderland where people stand toe-to-toe with the forces of death. *Do you not care that we are perishing?*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Skinner, "Commentary on Mark 4:35-41," [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The good news — of course — is that Christ is there, ready to respond to his people's cries.

As Scripture reminds us time and again, Jesus shows up in liminal spaces. In in-between spaces. And wherever he goes, the forces of death are defeated. In the graveyard, Jesus casts out the unclean spirit that has tormented a man for years, freeing him to embrace a future away from the tombs. And, at the sickbed, he rescues a little girl from the clutches of death, restoring her to life and to community. And, on the cross, death exacted on Good Friday yields to a triumphant Easter. And here — on the Sea of Galilee — Jesus overpowers the forces of destruction and death, silencing the wind and calming the waves and restoring peace. Christ is there, in the midst of the storm ... in places that seem beyond hope or redemption.

And, because Jesus has dared to cross over to the other side, sites of risk becomes sites of resurrection. Wherever he goes, the sick receive healing and the captives find release; the abandoned are restored to community, and broken families are made whole. Wherever Jesus goes, the winds of destruction fall silent and waves return to their normal rhythms. Wherever Jesus goes, creation enjoys the gift of peace.

Yes, the good news is that Christ is there, ensuring that life will always conquer death.

Friends — as the church — we must follow Christ into these borderlands to offer hope in places that seem hopeless. For Jesus still calls his disciples, saying, "Let us go across to the other side."

And — thanks be to God — the church is heeding that call.

The church is there — at our southern border — bearing witness to Christ's presence in the midst of the storm. A friend and colleague has been sharing her experience of mission in the border town of McAllen, Texas. A group from her congregation spent the past week working alongside Catholic Charities — sorting donations which have flooded in from all across the country, and serving refugees released from detention, who need food and clothing and a safe place to sleep. The church is at the border, acting as the hands and feet of Christ.

And the church is offering a prophetic voice — calling for compassion in letters to representatives, demanding justice in statements of public faith. Just this past Thursday, our denomination's General Assembly took a stand to affirm the dignity of all human beings and to call for our country to protect the most vulnerable among us.<sup>4</sup> The church is in the midst of the storm, echoing Christ's call for peace.

The church is there — carrying out the mission and ministry of Jesus wherever storms rage. And through its witness as the body of Christ, the Spirit is present — offering hope, proclaiming peace, opening the way to life.

So, come — sisters and brothers — let us go across to the other side. Our Lord is already there.

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<sup>4</sup> See 09-04, "Commissioner's Resolution: Stop the Separation of Families," approved by the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2018.

## Prayers of the People ~ Sudie Niesen Thompson

In the beginning you spoke to chaos, O God of Creation. At your command, the waters below the heavens were gathered together, so the earth could sustain life. When the waters churned again, your Son spoke to chaos and commanded the wind and waves cease their raging. Once more, you acted to sustain life. You still speak — sometimes in a thundering cry, sometimes in a gentle whisper. Speak to us this day, and sustain us by your grace.

Speak your healing Word to all in need of comfort and hope. We lift before you those who are grieving, those who are lonely, those who are sick. Speak into the lives of those who need work and those who need rest; those who live under the threat of violence, and those who suffer under the yoke of injustice; those separated from family, and those longing for community. Remind them, remind us that we are all your beloved children. Speak, Lord, that we may be whole.

Even as we pray for healing, we ask that you would use us for your work. We are your people – those you have chosen, those you empower, those you uphold. Call us again to service, and send us into your world, guided by your Spirit. Bless, we pray, all who seek to follow you by working for justice and reconciliation and peace, in this community and around the world.

We pray these and all things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together:

**Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.**