

**“The God We Worship is the God Who Gifts Us, the God Who Calls Us,
and the God Who Expects Us to Pull Our Own Weight”**

Mark 4: 35-41

Psalm 46 begins with some very comforting words: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (v.1)*. And that very same Psalm ends with these words: *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (v. 7)*

High expectations these are, indeed. But the Bible tells us that God doesn't always meet with our expectations; God does not always deliver to our liking. There was a time in ancient Israel's history when God did not meet the expectations of the people. There was a time in ancient Israel's history when God did not deliver to their liking.

The people said to Samuel, the prophet: *“...there shall be a king over us...that our king may...go out before us and fight our battles”* (I Samuel 8: 19). That was just another way of saying, “Kings do the people's bidding; God has failed to come through for us. We want a king.”

That didn't end on a positive note.

We are slow to learn. *“Jesus...knowing they intended to come and take him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone”* (John 6:15).

If we could liken our appreciation of God's grace to a Colleen Drive-in ice cream sundae, it's as if we're given, absolutely free, three scoops of ice cream with all the toppings capped off with whipped cream and a cherry, but we return it for a refund because “the sprinkles are all brown; I prefer the multi-colored sprinkles!”

The God we worship is the God who gifts us, the God who calls us, and the God who expects us to pull our own weight....knowing full well that God forever remains our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Maintaining that balance in our faith walk presents quite the challenge.

The Gospels teach us that the disciples were very fond of placing on Jesus' shoulders the full weight of all the messianic baggage.

The Gospels teach us that the disciples did not hesitate to open up the side pouches of Jesus' backpack and unload a host of personal needs and longings as well.

The Gospels teach us that the disciples were good at snubbing their noses at the ice cream sundaes Jesus prepared for them because the sprinkles were the wrong color...or there were too many sprinkles...or there were not enough of them.

The disciples came from various backgrounds, but four of them...Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John...were fishermen. They sailed the waters, cast the nets, pulled them in, cleaned the fish, mended the nets, always in the elements. They knew the water. They had weathered many storms, thank you.

And then there came that evening by the seashore. Jesus had been teaching the crowds in parables all day long. He concluded with the parable of the mustard seed, which served as our Gospel text last week. Then they piled in a boat together to go over to the other side. Jesus fell asleep, and a fierce storm arose. The boat was beginning to fill with water.

Among those on board were the four fishermen who must have experienced similar circumstances before. It's not difficult to imagine they had many times been out on the waters when waves were breaking over the bow and the boat was filling up. I don't know what seasoned seamen do at such times, but they do something. Certainly, they had done "something" many times before.

The text in Mark indicates only that they grew afraid and pleaded to Jesus for help. *"Teacher, we're all going to die! Don't you care? Do something for Pete's sake!"*

At the very least, couldn't they have started out with, *"Hey, Jesus. Wake up here and help us bail!"* That thought never crossed their minds. Instead, it was, "Hey Jesus, wake up and **bail us out** of this mess!"

They called out to Jesus not as another set of helpful hands; they called out to Jesus as the only set of hands on board an ailing vessel. These weathered seamen...they threw their years of experience overboard and cried out to Jesus as if He were their only resource.

Jesus came through here, didn't he? *"Peace, be still."* And the storm calmed, and all was well.

And we sing, "Hallelujah!"

But there is another way of reading the story. Yes, this is an account of Jesus who calms the storms in our lives. Thank God for that. Where would we be without Christ? But this passage could also be read as an account of capable men prematurely handing their courage over to Jesus.

Where is that line in the sand? Where is it in life where our abilities end and Jesus takes over? What are our limits?

We read another account in Mark 6:20-34. Jesus and the disciples are surrounded by a hungry crowd of people; not a hostile crowd, just a hungry crowd. The disciples say to Jesus, "Give a word of benediction, and let's scoot on over to Red Lobster."

Jesus would have none of that. Instead, he said to them, "You give them something to eat."

In short, the disciples responded back, "No way!"

Jesus then proceeded to feed them all.

And we sing, "Hallelujah!"

But there is another way of reading the story. Where is that line in the sand? Where is it in life where our abilities end and Jesus needs to take over? What are our limits? Could the disciples at least have responded, "Jesus, we don't know about the meat and potatoes, but you can count on us for the salt and pepper and the sweet iced tea."

When all were fed, Jesus ordered the disciples to get back in the boat and he sent them along to the other side; Jesus stayed behind and cleaned up after the crowd, sending them on their way. And after all that, Jesus went to the mountain to pray.

At about the fourth watch (between 3am and 6am), Jesus looked out and saw the disciples were having a difficult time...again. And he came to them, walking on the water..and he intended to book right on past them to the other side.

But, the disciples spotted Jesus, thought he was a ghost, and lost it again. Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid.” He changed directions, got in the boat with them, and the sea calmed.

Maybe they really didn’t need Jesus to calm the sea that night; perhaps they were fully capable of bailing the boat and getting to the other side as long as they did so together...as a team.

Maybe they really could have come up with more than the salt, pepper and catsup that afternoon if only they had pushed the “get in gear” button instead of the “panic” button.

Maybe they could have weathered the second storm that followed...had they not been so petrified by what they thought was a ghost but instead chose to use their energies and skills to do what it was some of them had done plenty of times before...weathered a storm in a boat on the sea and reached the other side!

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Jesus does calm the storm, but in the midst of calming the storm he just might hand us a bailing bucket and say, “Get to work!” Jesus does feed the multitudes, but He’s not beyond asking us to mix the batter for the fish fry.

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The line that separates our need for God’s grace and providential care from our need to “get it in gear” is a difficult one to discern.

Read through the accounts in Mark, chapter 4 and Mark, chapter 6 again. Jesus fully intended for the disciples to display more faith on that boat (Mark 4:40). Jesus expected those disciples to have much more of a direct hand in feeding the crowds (Mark 6:37). Jesus had no intention of stopping to lend a hand that night on the stormy sea (Mark 6:48).

How might the disciples have responded differently...more faithfully...to these challenging situations? That would be difficult to answer.

One thing is sure: Jesus expected them to do more than nothing.

