

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, June 14, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"CHRIST BRINGS A GREAT CALM"

Mark 4:35-41

Sometimes we must speak about the Christ who brings us a great challenge. For he does that you know. He challenges our priorities, our commitments, our faith, our stewardship, our service, our way of life. But other times we must speak of the Christ who brings us a great calm. For keeping up with everything in our highly connected world often makes us feel rushed and frantic. Then there are the inevitable storms that life brings to us. Where do we find peace in the midst of it all? Well, the Gospel tells us - in Jesus Christ.

Mark records in chapter 4 that one evening Jesus told the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." The disciples must have wondered why Jesus wanted to leave the Jewish side of Galilee and go across to the less promising Gentile area. But the disciples had learned to obey when the Master spoke. Leaving the crowd behind, they took Jesus with them in the boat and set off. Out on Galilee a great storm arose. The boat began filling up with water and the disciples were terrified. Mark describes the storm as if it had demonic power. Amazingly, Jesus was able to sleep soundly through it all, perhaps because he knew that his hour had not yet come. The disciples shook Jesus awake, yelling, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased and there was a great calm. (4:39) So here's my message for today. **Life brings us great storms, but Jesus Christ brings us a great calm.**

Let's start here. Life brings us great storms.

Now we've all been in some kind of natural storm - a hailstorm, a thunderstorm, a blizzard. These storms can threaten and even take human life. They can cause a large jet to plunge into the ocean.

I will never forget one December day in Cape Breton driving on a highway near the Highlands. Dark clouds suddenly gathered, the wind began howling and snow started falling at terrific rate. I couldn't see ahead or behind. It was a total white-out. The road quickly covered with snow, obliterating all markers. For all

I knew I could have been heading straight for the ditch. I knew that if I stopped someone could plow into me from behind. So I held the wheel tightly and tried to drive straight ahead, slowly. After about 5 minutes the snow eased a bit and I saw that I was still on the road. Then the snow stopped altogether. The tension and fear drained from my body and I drove on with a sense of gratitude and peace.

But there are other storms, too, storms that come from the outside and cause great storms inside. We know those kinds of storms - like the one that comes when your boss calls you and ten others to a meeting room. The well-dressed, professional human resources person hands you a letter which begins "we regret to inform you that due to the economic downturn in our industry..." Your head begins to spin as she says, "We're sorry, but you have half-an-hour to clear out your desk and leave the building." Or you're a business owner and the bank manager says, "You've been overextended on your line of credit for a year. We're calling the loan."

Or you sit down across from your doctor. The look on his face tells you that something is wrong. "The tests show cancer", he says, "but we're going to do all that we can." And it might even be worse if it happens to someone you love.

Or you give in to a terrible temptation which leads to the loss of house or career or spouse or family. When the reality of it finally hits, a storm of guilt and remorse comes upon you. Or a call comes from the school principal requesting an appointment to speak about your child. And what you hear comes as a complete surprise. You had no idea. A heaviness descends upon your heart.

Yes, life brings great storms. The winds howl, the waves roll, the boat rocks. Your world turns upside-down.

Let me tell a story to lighten the mood a bit. Two gas company employees were walking in an alley behind some town houses, checking gas meters on each house. When they had finished reading the meter at the last house, they challenged each other to a foot race back to the truck. As soon as they arrived at the truck, a woman came running up behind them, huffing and puffing. "What are you doing?" they asked her. Panting she said, "I live in the last house back there. And when I see two gas men checking my meter then quickly running away, I figure I'd better get out of there real fast."

I know of a family who was called to come home quickly from their cottage. Workers had been repairing the house next door, when somehow flames from the blow torch blew across the gap and landed on their roof. In a few moments

their beloved house burst into flames and was nearly gone before the fire department arrived.

Life brings storms. Expectations are overturned. The things we've worked for blow up in our face. And those outer storms set off storms inside of us, storms of anguish, fear, self-doubt, even doubts about God. "Lord, do you not care if we are perishing?"

Victor Hugo, who wrote *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, wrote another story called *Ninety-Three* about a ship caught in a storm at sea. At the height of the storm, the frightened sailors heard a terrible crashing noise below the deck. They knew that this noise came from a cannon that had broken loose. It was moving back and forth, crashing into the sides of the ship with terrible force. Knowing that it could cause the ship to sink, two brave sailors volunteered to go down and try to retie the loose cannon. The storm inside was even worse than the storm outside.

Who is brave enough to rise up and say to the storms that rage around us and within us, "Peace! Be still!" Who can bring calm in the midst of a storm? Who is the one whom the wind and sea and even demons obey? The Gospel proclaims that it is Jesus Christ. Mark writes, "Then the wind ceased and there was a great calm." **Life brings us great storms, but Jesus Christ brings us a great calm.** He is the One who can do it because he was with the Father when the wind and the seas were created. Indeed, all things were created through him and obey his command. He is the one who became flesh and lived a sinless life, and was obedient to the Father's will unto death, even death on a Cross. He is the One who died for us, making atonement for our sins. He is the One who rose from the dead, victorious over the power of evil and sin and death. He is the One who will come again in God's time and complete God's Kingdom. The Book of Revelation shows us the glassy sea before the throne in God's Kingdom, the glassy sea - a sign of that time when all storms are past and gone forever.

And even now Jesus Christ brings us a great calm. If we have taken Jesus on our life's voyage by faith, then his power is at work in our lives and in the church. Sometimes it seems God sits in heaven and does nothing while storms rage around us and within us. But God sent Jesus, who is Emmanuel, "God with us." And Jesus, Emmanuel, is with us now by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus is so close that we may overlook or forget his presence. But He always accompanies us on life's journey and stays with us through every storm. We may feel the storm's fury outside and inside for a time, but finally Jesus Christ brings us a great calm.

One day six or seven years ago I was called to the Credit Valley Hospital to see a young woman and her husband. I didn't really know them. Their connection with the church was attending our family Christmas Eve services with their three daughters. The woman, in her thirties, had been diagnosed with a truly demonic form of cancer. She was told she had two weeks to live. The young woman and her husband were wrapped in grief, tears, anger, disbelief. Talk about a storm of fear and emotions. What could I say? What comfort could I bring? I couldn't even pray with them. I just stood there and finally said something like, "I don't know what to say, but I know that Jesus is with you here. Put your faith in Jesus," then left. The next day I went back, expecting to find the same thing going on. But instead I found a sense of calm acceptance in that room, both in the young woman and her husband. I can only put it to down to the fact that a name had been spoken, the name of Jesus, and his presence had brought the peace that passes understanding. Two weeks later we held her funeral service in this church. And last Christmas Eve, the husband came up to speak to me after the service. It was the first I'd seen him in six years. He had remarried and was holding a little baby girl in his arms.

I've also had people telling me of going into the doctor after treatments, expecting the worst, and hearing the doctor say, "We see no more sign of your disease. It seems like the treatments worked." Imagine the peace and calm that brings to someone's heart. Sometimes Jesus brings calm while the storm still rages. Sometimes He brings calm by stilling the storm altogether. In the storm of sin and guilt, he brings the calm of forgiveness to a repentant heart. In Christ's hands we are in good hands, hands of love that will never let us go in life, in death, in life beyond death.

I remember someone telling me about losing his job. And as he went through that awful experience words from Isaiah 42 kept coming to his mind, "Fear not, I am with you, I have redeemed you...when you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you..." And in the weeks and months ahead, whenever he was nearly overcome by fear and despair, those words would come to his mind and bring him steadiness and calm. Eventually he saw the Lord's hand at work leading him to a new position and a new opportunity.

And that family whose house was burned said that peace came as they received the help of so many caring friends, including their church friends, practical help which sustained and supported them through their loss and the rebuilding of their house.

Life brings us great storms, but Jesus Christ brings us a great calm. Maybe someone here today came in feeling buffeted by life's storms, but will leave here

with a calm heart. And you know who brought that gift to you, don't you? His name is Jesus, the Master.

So that brings us back to his words of challenge. Jesus asked the disciples. "Where is your faith?" And now he asks us, "Where is your faith? Is your faith and trust in me? Have you invited me to ride the seas of life with you? Have you taken me on board? Do you trust me to bring you safely to the other side?" The disciples said in wonder and in awe, "Even the winds and sea obey him!!" That's wonderful, for sure. But do we? Do we trust and obey Christ? God help us to do that all of our days. For those who trust and obey Christ truly know the fulfilment of this truth. Life brings us great storms, but Jesus Christ brings us a great calm.