“Who’s to Blame?”

Mark 4:35-41

June 24, 2018

 We just love to blame other people, don’t we? Nothing like finding out that something wasn’t our fault. Probably one of the first examples would be looking at our children. Scarlet and Lacey are starting to steal each others toys. Even if there are two of them. Lacey will come swooping by and steal Scarlet’s doll. Then the crying begins. If they were able to talk in complete sentences, Scarlet would say, she stole my toy. It is all her fault that I’m crying. Think of the first time you got into a fight. The teacher runs over to break it up. And you said, He started it. And often the teacher will say, “I don’t care who started it, you both are in trouble.” Now thinking back on that sort of statement, doesn’t it seem strange. Shouldn’t it matter who started the fight? Shouldn’t you have the right to stand up for yourself? You shouldn’t just sit back and take it because you might get in trouble.

 We are a society that that values individualism. Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, an expectation of privacy. That we are supposed to find in our hearts our own calling. Not what our parents want for us. That whatever we do is up to us, not the community. If something goes well it was because of our own efforts. If it goes wrong, it is our fault too. But often when things go wrong we look to blame others. It was my parents fault for holding me back. It was the government’s fault. It was whoever’s fault. Funny how that works. We try and do our own thing, but when it goes wrong, it’s someone else’s fault. Sure there are cases where it truly may be someone else’s fault. But the blame game is a dangerous game. Also when something goes bad on your team it was because of one bad apple. Not because of a systemic dysfunction within the system. Those are some of the issues that happen in an individualist system.

 Last Sunday, we heard from the parables that Jesus was teaching to the folks on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. I bet after all of that teaching to the crowd assembled there, Jesus was pretty tired. So evening had come and he wants to get out of Dodge. He says to his disciples, Let us go across to the other side. He needed to get away. It should be noted that he doesn’t get away by himself. We like privacy when we need quiet or rest time. Privacy wasn’t a thing in the ancient middle east. People lived close to each other and always knew everyone elses business. If someone roamed away on their own, they were branded the man who walks alone. Which wasn’t a good thing to them. This was a highly communal culture, so if quiet time was needed, you did it with your close family and friends. Even other boats came along on this journey across the lake. We don’t know what the conditions looked like before they departed. It was probably nice outside. But then a great storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

 The Sea of Galilee is not really a Sea, just a large lake. Weather could change on a dime and that is what it did here. A Megas Storm came upon them, which is the Greek word for great. There they notice that Jesus is asleep on some sort of cushion. I would think that the disciples and all of us would be rightly enraged. They say, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” I probably would have yelled something much more profane at him. Remember they do not know Jesus Christ like we do yet. They don’t have the whole story. They were called as disciples but they don’t know his whole identity yet. They saw the healing of the man with the withered hand. They saw unclean spirits fall down before Jesus and proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. But Jesus has yet to refer to himself that way. He has just referred to himself as the “Son of Man”. They are currently calling him teacher. If you are going to be on a boat with experienced fishermen, you should pull your weight. Not take a nap. As any experienced sailor would know, storms are a big deal. One sailor had been asked if he had been in a really big storm, and he said this, “Always remember, that no matter how big you are, the lake is bigger. And the lake doesn’t care.” Another sailor said, “An experienced sailor, is someone who has tried something they shouldn’t have tried. An experienced sailor is someone who will never try that again.” So these experienced sailors were in extreme distress. Perhaps they saw they ending coming. That they would all die out here. Sure they saw Jesus do some healing, but can he do anything about this?

 For ancient Israelites, water was chaos. Water was where demons were cast into. Water could change on a dime. It was always bigger and badder than you. No one could do anything about that. Only God can. Look at our text from Job. Job and his friends have been talking about his suffering and the lack of God’s justice. Job has been pleading to see God face to face and to put God on trial. He desperately wanted this encounter with God, but he fears it. Hear these words from Job 9, “If I summoned him to court and he answered me, I do not believe he would listen to my voice. Surely he will crush me with a whirlwind and multiply my wounds without cause.” God does appear some time later. God appears in the whirlwind or better yet a storm. “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, and I will question you, and you shall declare to me.” Gird up your loins like a man. Basically, tie a rope around your waist and get ready for a fight. The modern-day equivalent may be “Come at me Bro.” Where we you, Job, when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Did you do all that I did. Did you take control of the sea? No, Job you did not.

 Only God can control the waters. The disciples on the boat knew that. So Jesus why are you just sitting there doing nothing? Help us bail out this boat! They can’t even see the other boats that went out with them. They are totally concentrated on getting themselves to safety. “Don’t you care that we are dying?” This is pure desperation. It’s rude, but they thought they were in their last moments of life. Be part of our crew.

 So, Jesus gets up, he rebukes the wind, “Peace! Be Still!” It might be better translated as Shut Up! Then the wind ceased. There was a Megas Calm. “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Traditionally we have taken this text to show how feeble these disciples were. That they had no trust in Jesus. But they don’t know who he is yet. Jesus just did something that only God can do. The disciples were filled with great awe. This is a poor translation. The word is phobos, which means fear. They were fearing a great fear. Rightly so. They saw him do something that no human should be able to do. And were accused of having no faith.

 They may have been accused of having no faith, or a different translation may be, “Don’t you have faith yet?” That changes the whole meaning. Didn’t you just see what I did here? Do you all have an idea of who I am yet? They are getting there. They respond to all of this with, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

 There is no problem with fear. Fear can be healthy. Fear tells us not to cross the street in oncoming traffic. Fear tells us not to touch the hot stove. Fear can keep us safe. But fear can paralyze us. According to Rev. David Lose, “You don’t have to have perfect faith for God to respond; indeed you can even be paralyzed by fear, assume the worst about God, and still receive God’s mercy and grace…and them, perhaps an invitation to greater faith.”

 That is what this story is. An invitation to greater faith. Fear can paralyze us and this invitation is to faith to get us unparalyzed by fear. There is no greater example of getting paralyzed by fear then with our recent immigration crisis. Until just a couple of days ago with the president’s executive order, families were being separated after crossing the border. Our government has been separating families who seek asylum in the US after crossing the border illegally. Between October 1, 2017 and May 31st of this year, at least 2,700 children have been split from their parents. Almost 2000 of them were separated over the last six weeks of that time. There was a policy that all adults caught crossing the border illegally were to be criminally prosecuted. They are separated because the children cannot be in federal jail with their parents. We have all seen the pictures. Children crying when being separated from their parents. Groups of kids in cages. How bad the cages are is up to much speculation. Then the blame game begins.

 Conservatives start blaming the liberals, saying that this same sort of thing happened under Clinton and Obama. They say, “Where was your outrage then.” Just another part of the fun journalistic game called Whataboutism? What about them? What about when it happened then? And whatever what about question you could come up with. Liberals blame the conservatives for all of this, weather it is deserved at all. Fear brings us to the blame game. Instead of action. And for the common person, fear of not knowing what to do sets in. What can I possibly do about this?

 Friends it doesn’t really matter who started all of this, in this case. It needs to be fixed. Can you imagine fleeing your home because of violence? Then looking for safe Haven, you head to the border. Your children are separated from you. You do not understand the language of this new land. You have no idea when you will get your children back. This has to stop. This has to be fixed. This is not a political issue. This is a moral issue. The solutions are not clear, but separated children from their families is not the answer.

 All of this stems from fear. And the great polarization we have in this country. That we cannot work with the other side. That we avoid others that don’t think like us. We think that they are not worth saving. They are too far off. That is not what life in Christ calls us to do. When we see something that is wrong, we speak up. Sometimes that will work, sometimes it will not. But we don’t stand by doing nothing. Until we learn to understand everyone as a child of God, we won’t get anywhere. If we can’t understand that the immigrant looking for safety, our president, our neighbor or anyone else are equal in God’s eyes, we are missing the point. That is what fear can do. It is hard to get over that. But we have a God and a savior that can say to the chaos, “Shut Up!” We have Jesus who invites us to greater faith in the midst of all of life storms. Can we receive that invitation? Can we resist the urge for blame? And instead work for concrete solutions? Like donate to causes that we care about, say donate to organizations working for these separated families at the border. See the calm after the storm. It is hard to settle into that calm when it comes. It will happen. God will make it so. Amen.

**Mark 4:35-41**

**Jesus Stills a Storm**

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ 36And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ 39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’41And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’