

## Gospel - Mark 4: 25-31

### Pentecost 4

Sermon 6.20.21 'Let Us Go Across'

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“When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, **‘Let us go across to the other side.’**” Jesus was on mission—to go across, probably from Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and definitely crossing east to the region of the Gerasenes, as we see in Mark 5. It was, or should have been, about a two hour journey by boat.

As an aside, the words, “go across,” remind me of the word “Hebrew,” which literally means a person who has “crossed over.” Hebrew is first applied to the Patriarch Abraham (Abram), who crossed over the River Euphrates into the land of Canaan from the land of Egypt.

Moreover, Abram was instructed by God to

*<sup>14b</sup> ‘Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards; <sup>15</sup> for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. <sup>17</sup> Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you (Genesis 13).*

Like Father Abraham before him, Jesus made a mission of walking through all of historical Israel, both sides of the sea, not to lay claim to any natural resources, but to gain human hearts.

Push pause and give thought for a moment to our adjoining neighborhoods where we are planted. What would it mean for us to “walk through the length and breadth” of it, to lift our eyes “northwards and southwards and eastwards and west-wards,” realizing a wide scope of God-promised opportunities to be able to serve Shelton with gospel message and gospel action, with gospel hope and gospel help?

It’s called “ministry in context” or “community mapping,” which recognizes our surrounding world as our immediate mission.

This world around us, streets and buildings, comings and goings, businesses, government offices, and human services, its daytime bustle and all its nightlife, its seasons and celebrations —they are our mission, and what shall we do, how shall we plan and what adventures are we yet to encounter? What obstacles shall we meet and what stories shall we later tell?

What would it be like to spiritually map our Shelton streets? Where is God showing up to display God’s wonders? Where do people feel abandoned and helplessly wish for themselves some manner of a miracle? What would it be like to be God’s own hands and heart extended? We can say with Jesus, “Let us go across to the other side.” In other words, let us go out the doors of St. David’s and cross over into our city streets to our sisters and brothers in Shelton who may need our help.

Anyway, Jesus says he needs to go over to the Geresenes, a traditional region of the Ammonites and Girgashites and later inhabited by Israelite tribes of Gad and half of Manasseh.

On mission and setting out by boat on a cool Autumn evening, everything seemed to be going well at least at the beginning. It may have been a mistake to pile 13 or more people into a common fishing vessel of the time.

Adding two hired hands to pilot the rented boat, it feels like it's dangerously overloaded. Jesus' disciples are in charge at this point, and apparently they decide to overlook the possibility of danger.

For Jesus' part I surmise he was in no state to be able to assess danger or intervene administratively. Jesus was spent, weary, worn out, ready for bed.

It says, "they took [Jesus] with them in the boat, just as he was." This tells me he was in some kind of a "condition." They took him into the boat trying not to bother, leaving him be.

He had already made the one decision to cross over to the other side. For now he was willing to let the circumstances happen as they would happen. Because he stayed on mission, he trusted that whatever may come, his mission could not be thwarted. That trust is a precious gift, familiar to anyone who has ever given themselves over to a greater purpose.

So it was that Jesus found his way to the stern of the boat to fall fast asleep on a cushion. Then "a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped." But Jesus was oblivious and unconscious of the danger. There finally reached a point where his disciples awakened him with "Lord, don't you care about *us*?" Do you think that they were miffed at him? He cared so much about many others, but did he care about them and their situation?

Jesus had already faced a storm of people and made it through. A storm of weather didn't bother him; it was pale by comparison. The wind and waves of human heart cries had beat against him; he'd commanded God's peace to every single one.

<sup>7b</sup> *A great multitude from Galilee [had] followed [Jesus];* <sup>8</sup> *hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.* <sup>9</sup> *He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him;* <sup>10</sup> *for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.* <sup>11</sup> *Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'* (Mark 3).

Ministry is exciting. Ministry is exhausting. It can also be a nightmare, a train wreck, a raging gale of raw human mortal need, all crashing down at once.

Sometimes I am certain you feel that way. At a visceral level a great wind-storm of some terrible circumstance arises, and all the waves of life beat against your boat, so that all you feel is that you are being swamped and sinking. You say, "O my God, don't you care? Don't you get that I'm perishing?"

Our human hurts can sometimes rage so sudden and strong and overwhelming, where even the little things can seem to us like life and death kinds of things. Little things are never little things to us. A sharp sliver under your fingernail creates a whole world of pain, you can feel it everywhere.

I want to get personal.

Sometimes I have been asleep in the back of the boat. By this I mean I have been working in the office with the door closed and unconscious of anyone who might be in the building or on the grounds.

That insensitivity on my part in fact proved hurtful to some people, when they were here onsite and I didn't know it. They expected me to say hello, share God's love. They needed their pastor to be present, and I failed.

I own my faults, and I own my sins. The idea that I didn't know to be sensitive because I was lost among my tasks is really no good excuse. Paraphrasing from one of the Lutheran liturgies, it was still "my fault, my own fault, my own grievous fault."

It was Jesus, "just as he was," who calmed the storm; not the transfigured Jesus or the resurrected Jesus, but the fully human Jesus after a long day. Therefore, "just as I was," I still could have noticed, stepped away from my work and done my part to communicate some welcome and peace and reassurance. In their own way they were asking, "Pastor, don't you care?"

I probably would've made new friends if I'd been sensitive. At least I would not have caused offence or stirred anger and pain.

One person wanted welcome and greeting, and I didn't give it.

One person lost a loved one and was facing a scary circumstance; I missed a chance to listen to their story and show support.

Church, will you please accept my apology? Will you please forgive me? I am hurt I caused hurt. As it says in our confession, "I am truly sorry, and I humbly repent." It's bad enough all the things we have all had to walk through in these days without the possibility of adding to more pain.

I'd much rather prefer praying your wind and your rain to go away. "Peace! Be still!" Or else at least give it a try.

For as long as I get to be at St. David, I can imagine there will be future times where you feel your need and you find me asleep. I would like to apologize in advance, but that feels insincere.

Let me instead invite you to get in my face like the disciples did with Jesus. Let me invite you to help wake me up. It is okay anytime for you to ask, "Don't you care?" I think Jesus appreciated their asking. It gave him opportunity to still the outer storm and also help still the inner storm.

Here is the analogy that I want to leave with you.

- We are all in the same boat together.
- We are on God's mission to cross to the other side, sailing from where we are now to the place we are meant to be.
- Storms will happen. Life and death situations will be experienced.
- Our mission's too great for us to do it alone, so we're overloaded and easily swamped.
- We may even feel God's absence and abandon and like God is asleep.

- We are invited by God to be honest with God, to get in God's face. "Lord, don't you care?" is as sincere a prayer as any that I know in the New Testament. "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever!" (Psalm 44:23).
- This I know: because we are all together and on God's mission with God in the boat, nothing can ultimately assail. Jesus will be roused, commanding weather, calming the gale. Storms will cease; they will not last forever. And we will definitely make it to the other side.

"Dear God, be good to me. The sea is so wide, and my boat is so small." Amen.